NOVEMBER 35 Cents

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

Spring Fever — DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS
The Ebony Stick — EARL DERR BIGGERS
A Perfectly Ordinary Case of Blackmail — A. A. MILNE
Memory Test — PETER B. KYNE
Knowing What I Know Now — BARRY PEROWNE

also LESTER DENT, ANTHONY ARMSTRONG, JULIAN SYMONS, *and others*

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy.

Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

Not For General Distribution

Sincere men and women, in search of the truth—those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to: Scribe K.R.M.

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)
San Jose California

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

CRIME STORIES

SPRING FEVER — *Dorothy Salisbury Davis* — 3

A PERFECTLY ORDINARY CASE OF BLACKMAIL — *A. A. Milne* — 21

DETECTIVE STORIES

MEMORY TEST — *Peter B. Kyne* — 32

V MARKS THE SPOT — *Lester Dent* — 41

CAT AND MOUSE — *Julian Symons* — 74

THE FIFTH DIMENSION — *Peter Godfrey* — 105

ONE-WAY STREET — *Anthony Armstrong* — 117

DISCOVERY

THE EBONY STICK — *Earl Derr Biggers* — 81

BEDTIME STORIES

THE HEAD IN THE BARREL — *Ralph Norman Weber* — 102

KNOWING WHAT I KNOW NOW — *Barry Perowne* — 127

EQMM "FIRST"

DEAR DEPARTED HAROLD — *Barbara Vetterlein* — 68

MINUTE MYSTERY

THE CASE OF THE ABANDONED TOWER — *Austin Ripley* — 65

BOOK REVIEWS

DETECTIVE DIRECTORY — *Robert P. Mills* — 66

PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 19, No. 108, NOV. 1952. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879.

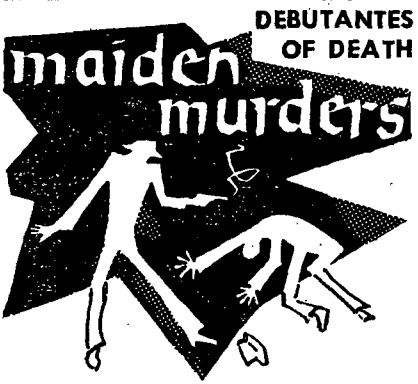
Copyright, 1952, by Mercury Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International Copyright Convention and the Pan-American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A.

ROBERT P. MILLS, *Managing Editor* JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *General Manager*

GEORGE SALTER, *Art Director*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Outstanding New Mystery Books



20 famous mystery writers present their FIRST murder stories, including Ellery Queen, Georges Simenon, Lillian de la Torre, Stuart Palmer, Anthony Boucher, Lawrence Blochman, Hugh Pentcost, and 13 others.

Introduction by
JOHN DICKSON CARR

$3.00 *at all bookstores* • **HARPER, N.Y. 16**

DR. CARL JUNG

An ardent mystery fan

"When Jung [founder of analytical psychology] is not pondering the relation of modern man to his soul, he is apt to be found sailing a small ketch on the Lake of Zurich, or reading an endless chain of violent detective stories, sometimes at the rate of one a day." *

Dr. Jung, one of the most celebrated students of the human mind, thus joins the company of such leaders of world thought as Bertrand Russell, Ivor Brown, Harold U. Nicolson, and scores of others who find relaxation from the strain of this atomic age in the reading of detective stories.

IT'S SMART TO READ MYSTERIES
IT'S ALSO GOOD FOR YOUR PEACE OF MIND

** From TIME, July 7, 1952.*

HAROLD NICOLSON

noted British biographer, novelist and diplomat, writing in The Spectator

"I have often endeavored . . . to communicate to others the comfort and the relaxation that I obtain from the reading of detective fiction. . . . When anxiety or worry comes to quicken the pulse, or a bout of overwork renders it sluggish, then is the moment to slide one of the slim volumes into the overcoat pocket, and to transport oneself for awhile into a world of adventure, ingenuity and daring."

TO A BOOK PUBLISHER:

Do you have trouble allocating the limited budget for your mystery books?

Then, use this page to help sell your mystery titles. The rate is low — only $77 per quarter-page unit; and the market is large and responsive.

The closing date for the December issue is October 3

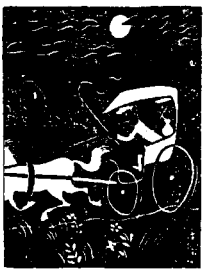
EQMM

570 Lexington Avenue New York 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

— PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY



One of our greatest pleasures, and sometimes one of our greatest thrills, is to welcome the first appearance in EQMM of a really fine writer. If we could enjoy that pleasure, and thrill, twelve times a year, our lives would be all the richer for it; but, alas, the first appearances of really fine writers are not every-issue occurrences — that would be too much to expect. So you can imagine the feeling of genuine delight we now have in welcoming Dorothy Salisbury Davis for the first time to the pages of EQMM. For Mrs. Davis is one of the coming "big names" in the detective field — you can make book on that, and give odds, to boot.

Mrs. Davis's first mystery novel was THE JUDAS CAT *(1949). Then came* THE CLAY HAND *(1950), and after that,* A GENTLE MURDERER *(1951) which most critics nominated as one of the top detective stories of last year. Her 1952 book is* A TOWN OF MASKS. *All her mystery novels have been published by Scribner's.*

Mrs. Davis was born in Chicago in 1916. She grew up on a farm, finished school at the ragged end of the depression, worked on the famous Writers Project, saw small-town America as the advance booster of a magic show, has been a librarian and an advertising copywriter, and is now married to Harry Davis, an actor (and a mighty fine actor, too). Being married to an actor is, in a sense, being married to the theatre; so don't be surprised one day to find Dorothy Salisbury Davis turned playwright . . .

In common with most mystery writers (who are really gentle people), Mrs. Davis, deep down, has an enormous distaste (to use a mild word) for violence. She feels that this revulsion must show in her work, but she also feels that it may exert a valuable influence on her style — making her find subtler and more evocative ways of expressing herself. She is fond of poetry and symbolism, and has long thought that it would be wonderful if all mystery writers juxtaposed these talents, as Edgar Allan Poe once did so magnificently.

Last year Dorothy Salisbury Davis wrote her first short story and submitted it to EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. "Spring Fever" won a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Second Prize, and is destined, we are positive, to become an anthology favorite. It is a beautifully written story, with a subtle, sustained mood and really superb characterizations. Indeed, we have a conviction that you won't ever completely forget Sarah Shepherd and Frank Joyce . . .

SPRING FEVER

by DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS

SARAH SHEPHERD WATCHED HER husband come down the stairs. He set his suitcase at the front door, checked his watch with the hall clock, and examined beneath his chin in the mirror. There was one spot he sometimes missed in shaving. He stepped back and examined himself full length, frowning a little. He was getting paunchy and not liking it. That critical of himself, how much more critical of her he might be. But he said nothing either in criticism or compliment, and she remembered, uncomfortably, doing all sorts of stunts to attract his eye: coy things — more becoming a girl than a woman of fifty-five. She did not feel her twelve years over Gerald . . . most of the time. Scarcely aware of the movement, she traced the shape of her stomach with her fingertips.

Gerald brought his sample spice kit into the living-room and opened it. The aroma would linger for some time after he was gone. "There's enough wood, dear, if it gets cold tonight," he said. "And I wish you wouldn't haul things from the village. That's what delivery trucks are for . . ." He numbered his solicitudes as he did the bottles in the sample case, and with the same noncommittal attention.

As he took the case from the table, she got up and went to the door with him. On the porch he hesitated a moment, flexing his shoulders and breathing deeply. "On a morning like this I almost wish I drove a car."

"You could learn, Gerald. You could reach your accounts in half the time, and . . ."

"No, dear. I'm quite content with my paper in the bus, and in a town a car's a nuisance." He stooped and brushed her cheek with his lips. "Hello there!" he called out as he straightened up.

Her eyes followed the direction in which he had called. Their only close neighbor, a vegetable and flower grower, was following a plow behind his horse, his head as high as the horse's was low, the morning wind catching his thatch of gray hair and pointing it like a shock of wheat.

"That old boy has the life," Gerald said. "When I'm his age that's for me."

"He's not so old," she said.

"No. I guess he's not at that," he said. "Well, dear, I must be off. Till

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tomorrow night, take care of yourself."

His step down the road was almost jaunty. It was strange that he could not abide an automobile. But not having one was rather in the pattern. A car would be a tangible link between his life away and theirs at home. Climbing into it of an evening, she would have a feeling of his travels. The dust would rub off on her. As it was, the most she had of him away was the lingering pungency of a sample spice kit.

When he was out of sight she began her household chores — the breakfast dishes, beds, dusting. She had brought altogether too many things from the city. Her mother had left seventy years accumulation in the old house, and now it was impossible to lay a book on the table without first moving a figurine, a vase, a piece of delft. Really the place was a clutter of bric-a-brac. Small wonder Gerald had changed toward her. It was not marriage that had changed him — it was this house, and herself settling in it like an old buddha with a bowl of incense in his lap.

A queer thing that this should occur to her only now, she thought. But it was not the first time. She was only now finding a word for it. Nor had Gerald always been this remote. Separating a memory of a particular moment in their early days, she caught his eyes searching hers — not numbering her years, as she might think were he to do it now, but measuring his own worth in her esteem.

She lined up several ornaments that might be put away, or better, sold to a junkman. But from the lineup she drew out pieces of which she had grown especially fond. They had become like children to her, as Gerald made children of the books with which he spent his evenings home. Making a basket of her apron she swept the whole tableful of trinkets into it.

Without a downward glance, she hurried them to the ash-box in the backyard. Shed of them, she felt a good deal lighter, and with the May wind in her face and the sun gentle, like an arm across her shoulders, she felt very nearly capersome. Across the fence the jonquils were in bloom, and the tulips, nodding like fat little boys. Mr. Joyce had unhitched the horse. He saw her then.

"Fine day this morning," he called. He gave the horse a slap on the rump that sent him into the pasture, and came to the fence.

"I'm admiring the flowers," she said.

"Lazy year for them. Two weeks late they are."

"Is that a fact?" Of course it's a fact, she thought. A silly remark, and another after it: "I've never seen them lovelier, though. What comes out next?"

"Snaps, I guess this year. Late roses, too. The iris don't sell much, so I'm letting 'em come or stay as they like."

"That should bring them out."

"Now isn't that the truth? You can coax and tickle all year and not get a bloom for thanks. Turn your back on 'em and they run you down."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Like love, she thought, and caught her tongue. But a splash of color took to her cheeks.

"Say, you're looking nice, Mrs. Shepherd, if you don't mind my saying it."

"Thank you. A touch of spring, I suppose."

"Don't it just send your blood racing? How would you like an armful of these?"

"I'd be very pleased, Mr. Joyce. But I'd like to pay you for them."

"Indeed not. I won't sell half of them — they come in a heap."

She watched his expert hand nip the blooms. He was already tanned, and he stooped and rose with a fine grace. In all the years he had lived next to them he had never been in the house, nor they in his except the day of his wife's funeral. He hadn't grieved much, she commented to Gerald at the time. And little wonder. The woman was pinched and whining, and there wasn't a sunny day she didn't expect a drizzle before nightfall. Now that Sarah thought of it, Joyce looked younger than he did when Mrs. Joyce was still alive.

"There. For goodness' sakes, Mr. Joyce. That's plenty."

"I'd give you the field of them this morning," he said, piling her arms with the flowers.

"I've got half of it now."

"And what a picture you are with them."

"Well, I must hurry them into water," she said. "Thank you."

She hastened toward the house, flying like a young flirt from her first conquest, and aware of the pleased eye following her. The whole morning glowed in the company she kept with the flowers. She snapped off the radio: no tears for Miss Julia today. At noon she heard Mr. Joyce's wagon roll out of the yard as he started to his highway stand. She watched at the window. He looked up and lifted his hat.

At odd moments during the day, she thought of him. He had given her a fine sense of herself and she was grateful. She began to wish that Gerald was returning that night. Take your time, Sarah, she told herself. You don't put away old habits and the years like bric-a-brac. She had softened up, no doubt of it. Not a fat woman, maybe, but plump. Plump. She repeated the word aloud. It had the sound of a potato falling into a tub of water.

But the afternoon sun was warm and the old laziness came over her. Only when Mr. Joyce came home, his voice in a song ahead of him, did she pull herself up. She hurried a chicken out of the refrigerator and then called to him from the porch.

"Mr. Joyce, would you like to have supper with me? Gerald won't be home, and I do hate cooking for just myself."

"Oh, that'd be grand. I've nothing in the house but a shank of ham that a dog wouldn't bark for. What can I bring?"

"Just come along when you're ready."

Sarah, she told herself, setting the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

table, you're an old bat trying your wings in daylight. A half-hour later she glanced out of the window in time to see Mr. Joyce skipping over the fence like a stiff-legged colt. He was dressed in his Sunday suit and brandishing a bottle as he cleared the barbed wire. Sarah choked down a lump of apprehension. For all that she planned a little fun for herself, she was not up to galloping through the house with an old Don Juan on her heels. Mr. Joyce, however, was a well-mannered guest. The bottle was May wine. He drank sparingly and was lavish in his praise of the dinner.

"You've no idea the way I envy you folks, Mrs. Shepherd. Your husband especially. How can he bear the times he spends away?"

He bears it all too well, she thought. "It's his work. He's a salesman. He sells spices."

Mr. Joyce showed a fine set of teeth in his smile — his own teeth, she marveled, tracing her bridgework with the tip of her tongue while he spoke. "Then he's got sugar and spice and everything nice, as they say."

What a one he must have been with the girls, she thought, and to marry a quince as he had. It was done in a hurry no doubt, and maybe at the end of a big stick.

"It must be very lonesome for you since Mrs. Joyce passed away," she said more lugubriously than she intended. After all the woman was gone three years.

"No more than when she was with me." His voice matched hers in seriousness. "It's a hard thing to say of the dead, but if she hasn't improved her disposition since, we're all in for a damp eternity." He stuffed the bowl of his pipe. "Do you mind?"

"No, I like the smell of tobacco around the house."

"Does your husband smoke?"

"Yes," she said in some surprise at the question.

"He didn't look the kind to follow a pipe," he said, pulling noisily at his. "No, dear lady," he added when the smoke was shooting from it, "you're blessed in not knowing the plague of a silent house."

It occurred to her then that he was exploring the situation. She would give him small satisfaction. "Yes. I count that among my blessings."

There was a kind of amusement in his eyes. You're as lonesome as me, old girl, they seemed to say, and their frankness bade her to add: "But I do wish Gerald was home more of the time."

"Ah, well, he's at the age when most men look to a last trot around the paddock," he said, squinting at her through the smoke.

"Gerald is only forty-three," she said, losing the words before she knew it.

"There's some take it at forty, and others among us leaping after it from the rocking chair."

The conversation had taken a turn she certainly had not intended, and she found herself threshing around in it. Beating a fire with a feather duster. "There's the moon," she said, charg-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing to the window as though to wave to an old friend.

"Aye," he said, "there's the moon. Are you up to a trot in it?"

"What did you say, Mr. Joyce?"

"I'd better say what I was thinking first. If I hitch Micky to the old rig, would you take a turn with me on the Mill Pond Road?"

She saw his reflection in the window, a smug, daring little grin on his face. In sixteen years of settling she had forgotten her way with men. But it was something you never really forgot. Like riding a bicycle, you picked it up again after a few turns. "I would," she said.

The horse ahead of the rig was a different animal from the one on the plow that morning. Mr. Joyce had no more than thrown the reins over his rump than he took a turn that almost tumbled Sarah into the sun frames. But Mr. Joyce leaped to the seat and pulled Micky up on his hind legs with one hand and Sarah down to her cushion with the other, and they were off in the wake of the moon. . . .

The sun was full in her face when Sarah awoke the next morning. As usual, she looked to see if Gerald were in his bed by way of acclimating herself to the day and its routine. With the first turn of her body she decided that a gallop in a rusty-springed rig was not the way to assert a stay of youth. She lay a few moments thinking about it and then got up to an aching sense of folly. It remained with her through the day, giving way at times to a nostalgia for her bric-a-brac. She had never realized how much of her life was spent in the care of it.

By the time Gerald came home she was almost the person he had left the day before. She had held out against the ornaments, however. Only the flowers decorated the living-room. It was not until supper was over and Gerald had settled with his book that he commented.

"Sarah, what happened to the old Chinese philosopher?"

"I put him away. Didn't you notice? I took all the clutter out of here."

He looked about him vacantly as though trying to recall some of it. "So you did. I'll miss that old boy. He gave me something to think about."

"What?"

"Oh, I don't know. Confucius says . . . that sort of thing."

"He wasn't a philosopher at all," she said, having no notion what he was. "He was a farmer."

"Was he? Well, there's small difference." He opened the book.

"Aren't the flowers nice, Gerald?"

"Beautiful."

"Mr. Joyce gave them to me, fresh out of his garden."

"That's nice."

"Must you read every night, Gerald? I'm here all day with no one to talk to, and when you get home you stick your nose into a book . . ." When the words were half out she regretted them. "I didn't tell you, Gerald. I had Mr. Joyce to dinner last night."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That was very decent of you, dear. The old gentleman must find it lonesome."

"I don't think so. It was a relief to him when his wife died."

Gerald looked up. "Did he say that?"

"Not in so many words, but practically."

"He must be a strange sort. What did she die of?"

"I don't remember. A heart condition, I think."

"Interesting." He returned to his book.

"After dinner he took me for a ride in the horse and buggy. All the way to Cos Corner and back."

"Ha!" was his only comment.

"Gerald, you're getting fat."

He looked up. "I don't think so. I'm about my usual weight. A couple of pounds maybe."

"Then you're carrying it in your stomach. I noticed you've cut the elastic out of your shorts."

"These new fabrics," he said testily.

"They're preshrunken," she said. "It's your stomach. And haven't you noticed how you pull at your collar all the time?"

"I meant to mention that, Sarah. You put too much starch in them."

"I ran out of starch last week and forgot to order it. You can take a size fifteen-and-a-half now."

"Good Lord, Sarah, you're going to tell me next I should wear a horse collar." He let the book slide closed between his thighs. "I get home only three or four nights a week. I'm tired. I wish you wouldn't aggravate me, dear."

She went to his chair and sat on the arm of it. "Did you know that I was beginning to wonder if you'd respond to the poke of a hat-pin?"

He looked directly up at her for the first time in what had seemed like years. His eyes fell away. "I've been working very hard, dear."

"I don't care what you've been doing, Gerald. I'm just glad to find out that you're still human."

He slid his arm around her and tightened it.

"Aren't spring flowers lovely?" she said.

"Yes," he said, "and so is spring."

She leaned across him and took a flower from the vase. She lingered there a moment. He touched his hand to her. "And you're lovely, too."

This is simple, she thought, getting upright again. If the rabbit had sat on a thistle, he'd have won the race.

"The three most beautiful things in the world," Gerald said thoughtfully, "a white bird flying, a field of wheat, and a woman's body."

"Is that your own, Gerald?"

"I don't know. I think it is."

"It's been a long time since you wrote any poetry. You did nice things once."

"That's how I got you," he said quietly.

"And I got you with an old house. I remember the day my mother's will was probated. The truth, Gerald — wasn't it then you made up your mind?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He didn't speak for a moment, and then it was a continuance of some thought of his own, a subtle twist of association. "Do you remember the piece I wrote on the house?"

"I read it the other day. I often read them again."

"Do you, Sarah? And never a mention of it."

It was almost all the reading she did any more. His devotion to books had turned her from them. "Remember how you used to let me read them to you, Gerald? You thought that I was the only one besides yourself who could do them justice."

"I remember."

"Or was that flattery?"

He smiled. "It was courtship, I'm afraid. No one ever thinks anybody else can do his poetry justice. But Sarah, do you know — I'd listen tonight if you'd read some of them. Just for old time's sake."

For old time's sake, she thought, getting the folder from the cabinet and settling opposite him. He was slouched in his chair, pulling at his pipe, his eyes half-closed. Long ago this same contemplativeness in him had softened the first shock of the difference in their ages.

"I've always liked this one best — *The Morning of My Days.*"

"Well you might," he murmured. "It was written for you."

She read one piece after another, wondering now and then what pictures he was conjuring up of the moment he had written them. He would suck on his pipe at times. The sound was like a baby pulling at an empty bottle. She was reading them well, she thought, giving them a mellow vibrance, an old love's tenderness. Surely there was a moment coming when he would rise from the chair and come to her. Still he sat, his eyes almost closed, the pipe now in hand on the chair's arm. A huskiness crept into her voice, so rarely used to this length any more, and she thought of the nightingale's singing, the thorn against its breast. A slit of pain in her own throat pressed her to greater effort, for the poems were almost done.

She stopped abruptly, a phrase unfinished, at a noise in the room. The pipe had clattered to the floor, Gerald's hand still cupped in its shape, but his chin now on his breast. Laying the folder aside, she went over and picked up the pipe with a rather empty regret, as she would pick up a bird that had fallen dead at her feet.

Gerald's departure in the morning was in the tradition of all their days, even to the kiss upon her cheek and the words, "Till tomorrow evening, dear, take care."

Take care, she thought, going indoors. Take care of what? For what? Heat a boiler of water to cook an egg? She hurried her chores and dressed. When she saw Mr. Joyce hitch the wagon of flowers, she locked the door and waited boldly at the road for him.

"May I have a lift to the highway?" she called out, as he reined up beside her.

"You may have a lift to the world's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

end, Mrs. Shepherd. Give me your hand." He gave the horse its rein when she was beside him. "I see your old fella's taken himself off again. I daresay it gave him a laugh, our ride in the moonlight."

"It was a giddy business," she said.

"Did you enjoy yourself?"

"I did. But I paid for it afterwards." Her hand went to her back.

"I let out a squeal now and then bending over, myself. But I counted it cheap for the pleasure we had. I'll take you into the village. I've to buy a length of hose anyway. Or do you think you'll be taken for a fool riding in on a wagon?"

"It won't be the first time," she said. "My life's full of foolishness."

"It's a wise fool who laughs at his own folly. We've that in common, you and me. Where'll we take our supper tonight?"

He was sharp as mustard.

"You're welcome to come over," she said.

He nodded. "I'll fetch us a steak, and we'll give Micky his heels again after."

Sarah got off at the post office and stayed in the building until Joyce was out of sight — Joyce and the gapers who had stopped to see her get out of the wagon. Getting in was one thing, getting out another. A bumblebee after a violet. It was time for this trip. She walked to the doctor's office and waited her turn among the villagers.

"I thought I'd come in for a checkup, Dr. Philips," she said at his desk.

"And maybe you'd give me a diet."

"A diet?" He took off his glasses and measured her with the naked eye.

"I'm getting a little fat," she said. "They say it's a strain on the heart at my age."

"Your heart could do for a woman of twenty," he said, "but we'll have a listen."

"I'm not worried about my heart, Doctor, you understand. I just feel that I'd like to lose a few pounds."

"Uh-huh," he said. "Open your dress." He got his stethoscope.

Diet, apparently, was the rarest of his prescriptions. Given as a last resort. She should have gone into town for this, not to a country physician who measured a woman by the children she bore. "The woman next door to us died of a heart condition," she said, as though that should explain her visit.

"Who's that?" he asked, putting away the instrument.

"Mrs. Joyce. Some years ago."

"She had a heart to worry about. Living for years on stimulants. Yours is as sound as a bullet. Let's have your arm."

She pushed up her sleeve as he prepared the apparatus for measuring her blood pressure. That, she felt, was rising out of all proportion. She was ashamed of herself before this man, and angry at herself for it, and at him for no reason more than that he was being patient with her. "We're planning insurance," she lied. "I wanted our own doctor's opinion first."

"You'll have no trouble getting it,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Shepherd. And no need of a diet." He grinned and removed the apparatus. "Go easy on potatoes and bread, and on the sweets. You'll outlive your husband by twenty years. How is he, by the way?"

"Fine. Just fine, Doctor, thank you."

What a nice show you're making of yourself these days, Sarah, she thought, outdoors again. Well, come in or go out, old girl, and slam the door behind you . . .

Micky took to his heels that night. He had had a day of ease, and new shoes were stinging his hooves by nightfall. The skipping of Joyce with each snap of the harness teased him, the giggling from the rig adding a prickle. After the wagon, the rig was no more than a fly on his tail. He took the full reins when they slapped on his flanks and charged out from the laughter behind him. It rose to a shriek the faster he galloped and tickled his ears like something alive that slithered from them down his neck and his belly and into his loins. Faster and faster he plunged, the sparks from his shoes like ocean spray. He fought a jerk of the reins, the saw of the bit in his mouth a fierce pleasure. He took turns at his own fancy and only in sight of his own yard again did he yield in the fight, choking on the spume that lathered his tongue.

"By the holy, the night a horse beats me, I'll lie down in my grave," Joyce cried. "Get up now, you buzzard. You're not turning in till you go to the highway and back. Are you all right, Sarah?"

Am I all right, she thought. When in years had she known a wild ecstacy like this? From the first leap of the horse she had burst the girdle of fear and shame. If the wheels had spun out from beneath them, she would have rolled into the ditch contented.

"I've never been better," she said.

He leaned close to her to see her, for the moon had just risen. The wind had stung the tears to her eyes, but they were laughing. "By the Horn Spoon," he said, "you liked it!" He let the horse have his own way into the drive after all. He jumped down from the rig and held his hand up to her. "What a beautiful thing to be hanging in the back of the closet all these years."

"If that's a compliment," she said, "it's got a nasty bite."

"Aye. But it's my way of saying you're a beautiful woman."

"Will you come over for a cup of coffee?"

"I will. I'll put up the horse and be over."

The kettle had just come to the boil when he arrived.

"Maybe you'd rather have tea, Mr. Joyce?"

"Coffee or tea, so long as it's not water. And I'd like you to call me Frank. They christened me Francis but I got free of it early."

"And you know mine, I noticed," she said.

"It slipped out in the excitement. There isn't a woman I know who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wouldn't of collapsed in a ride like that."

"It was wonderful." She poured the water into the coffee pot.

"There's nothing like getting behind a horse," he said, "unless it's getting astride him. I wouldn't trade Micky for a Mack truck."

"I used to ride when I was younger," she said.

"How did you pick up the man you got, if you don't mind my asking?"

And you the old woman, she thought; where did you get her? "I worked for a publishing house and he brought in some poetry."

"Ah, that's it." He nodded. "And he thought with a place like this he could pour it out like water from a spout."

"Gerald and I were in love," she said, irked that he should define so bluntly her own thoughts on the matter.

"Don't I remember it? In them days you didn't pull the blinds. It used to put me in a fine state."

"Do you take cream in your coffee? I've forgotten."

"Aye, thank you, and plenty of sugar."

"You haven't missed much," she said.

"There's things you see through a window you'd miss sitting down in the living-room. I'll wager you've wondered about the old lady and me?"

"A little. She wasn't so old, was she, Mr. Joyce?" Frank, she thought. Too frank.

"That one was old in her crib. But she came with a greenhouse. I worked for her father."

Sarah poured the coffee, "You're a cold-blooded old rogue," she said.

He grinned. "No. Cool-headed I am, and warm-blooded. When I was young, I made out it was the likes of poetry. She sang like a bird on a convent wall. But when I caged her she turned into an old crow."

"That's a terrible thing to say, Mr. Joyce."

The humor left his face for an instant. "It's a terribler thing to live with. It'd put a man off his nut. You don't have a bit of cake in the house, Sarah, to go with this?"

"How about muffins and jam?"

"That'll go fine." He smiled again. "Where does your old fella spend the night in his travels?"

"In the hotel in whatever town he happens to be in."

"That's a lonesome sort of life for a married man," he said.

She pulled a chair to the cupboard and climbed up to get a jar of preserves. He made no move to help her although she still could not reach the jar. She looked down at him. "You could give me a hand."

"Try it again. You almost had it that time." He grinned, almost gleeful at her discomfort.

She bounced down in one step. "Get it yourself if you want it. I'm satisfied with a cup of coffee."

He pounded his fist on the table, getting up. "You're right, Sarah. Never fetch a man anything he can

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fetch himself. Which bottle is it?"

"The strawberry."

He hopped up and down, nimble as a goat. "But then maybe he doesn't travel alone?"

"What?"

"I was suggesting your man might have an outside interest. Salesmen have the great temptation, you know."

"That's rather impertinent, Mr. Joyce."

"You're right, Sarah, it is. My tongue's been home so long it doesn't know how to behave in company. This is a fine cup of coffee."

She sipped hers without speaking. It was time she faced that question, she thought. She had been hedging around it for a long time, and last night with Gerald should have forced it upon her. "And if he does have an outside interest," she said, lifting her chin, "what of it?"

"Ah, Sarah, you're a wise woman, and worth waiting the acquaintance of. You like me a little now, don't you?"

"A little."

"Well," he said, getting up, "I'll take that to keep me warm for the night."

And what have I got to keep me warm, she thought. "Thank you for the ride, Frank. It was thrilling."

"Was it?" he said, coming near her. He lifted her chin with his forefinger. "We've many a night like this ahead, Sarah, if you say the word." And then when she left her chin on his finger, he bent down and kissed her, taking himself to the door after it with a skip and a jump. He paused there and looked back at her. "Will I stay or go?"

"You'd better go," she choked out, wanting to be angry but finding no anger in herself at all.

All the next day Sarah tried to anchor herself from her peculiar flights of fancy. She had no feeling for the man, she told herself. It was a fine state a woman reached when a kiss from a stranger could do that to her. It was the ride made you giddy, she said aloud. You were thinking of Gerald. You were thinking of . . . the Lord knows what. She worked upstairs until she heard the wagon go by. She would get some perspective when Gerald came home. It seemed as though he'd been gone a long time.

The day was close and damp, and the flies clung to the screens. There was a dull stillness in the atmosphere. By late afternoon the clouds rolled heavier, mulling about one another like dough in a pan. While she was peeling potatoes for supper, Frank drove in. He unhitched the horse but left him in the harness, and set about immediately building frames along the rows of flowers. He was expecting a storm. She looked at the clock. It was almost time for Gerald.

She went out on the front porch and watched for the bus. There was a haze in the sweep of land between her and the highway, and the traffic through it seemed to float thickly, slowly. The bus glided toward the in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tersection and past it without stopping. She felt a sudden anger. Her whole day had been strung up to this peak. Since he had not called, it meant merely that he had missed the bus. The next one was in two hours. She crossed the yard to the fence. You're starting up again, Sarah, she warned herself, and took no heed of the warning.

Frank looked up from his work. "You'd better fasten the house," he said. "There's a fine blow coming."

"Frank, if you're in a hurry, I'll give you something to eat."

"That'd be a great kindness. I may have to go back to the stand at a gallop."

He was at the kitchen table, shoveling in the food without a word, when the heavy sky lightened. He went to the window. "By the glory, it may blow over." He looked around at her. "Your old boy missed the bus, did he?"

"He must have."

Frank looked out again. "I do like a good blow. Even if it impoverished me, there's nothing in the world like a storm."

An automobile horn sounded on the road. It occurred to Sarah that on a couple of occasions Gerald had received a ride from the city. The car passed, but watching its dust she was left with a feeling of suspended urgency. Joyce was chatting now. He had tilted back in the chair and for the first time since she had known him, he was rambling on about weather, vegetables, and the price of eggs. She found it more disconcerting than his bursts of intimate comment, and she hung from one sentence to the next waiting for the end of it. Finally she passed in back of his chair and touched her fingers briefly to his neck.

"You need a haircut, Frank."

He sat bolt upright. "I never notice it till I have to scratch. Could I have a drop more coffee?"

She filled his cup, aware of his eyes on her. "Last night was something I'll never forget — that ride," she said.

"And something else last night, do you remember that?"

"Yes."

"Would you give me another now to match it if I was to ask?"

"No."

"What if I took it without asking?"

"I don't think I'd like it, Frank."

He pushed away from the table, slopping the coffee into the saucer. "Then what are you tempting me for?"

"You've a funny notion of temptation," she flared up, knowing the anger was against herself.

Joyce spread his dirt-grimed fingers on the table. "Sarah, do you know what you want?"

The tears were gathering. She fought them back. "Yes, I know what I want!" she cried.

Joyce shook his head. "He's got you by the heart, hasn't he, Sarah?"

"My heart's my own!" She flung her head up.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joyce slapped his hand on the table. "Ho! Look at the spark of the woman! That'd scorch a man if there was a stick in him for kindling." He moistened his lips and in spite of herself Sarah took a step backwards. "I'll not chase you, Sarah. Never fear that. My chasing days are over. I'll neither chase nor run, but I'll stand my ground for what's coming to me." He jerked his head toward the window. "That was only a lull in the wind. There's a big blow coming now for certain."

She watched the first drops of rain splash on the glass. "Gerald's going to get drenched in it."

"Maybe it'll drown him," Joyce said, grinning from the door. "Thanks for the supper."

Let it come on hail, thunder, and lightning. Blow the roof from the house and tumble the chimney. I'd go out from it then and never turn back. When an old man can laugh at your trying to cuckold a husband, and the husband asking it, begging it, shame on you. She went through the house clamping the locks on the windows. More pleasure putting the broom through them.

An early darkness folded into the storm, and the walls of rain bleared the highway lights. There was an ugly yellow tinge to the water from the dust swirled into it. The wind sluiced down the chimney, spitting bits of soot on the living-room floor. She spread newspapers to catch it. A sudden blow, it would soon be spent. She went to the hall clock. The bus was due in ten minutes. What matter? A quick supper, a good book, and a long sleep. The wily old imp was right. A prophet needing a haircut.

The lights flickered off for a moment, then on again. Let them go out, Sarah. What's left for you, you can see by candlelight. She went to the basement and brought up the kerosene lamp and then got a flashlight from the pantry. As she returned to the living-room, a fresh gust of wind sent the newspapers out of the grate like scud. The lights flickered again. A sound drew her to the hall. She thought the wind might be muffling the ring of the telephone. When she got there, the clock was striking. The bus was now twenty minutes late. There was something about the look of the phone that convinced her the line was dead. It was unnerving to find it in order. Imagination, she murmured. Everything was going perverse to her expectations. And then, annoyed with herself, she grew angry with Gerald again. This was insult. Insult on top of indifference.

She followed a thumping noise upstairs. It was on the outside of the house. She turned off the light and pressed her face against the window. A giant maple tree was rocking and churning, one branch thudding against the house. There was not even a blur of light from the highway now. Blacked out. While she watched, a pinpoint of light shaped before her. It grew larger, weaving a little. A flashlight, she thought, and wondered if Gerald had one. Then she recognized

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the motion: a lantern on a wagon. Frank was returning.

When she touched the light switch there was no response. Groping her way to the hall she saw that all the lights were out now. Step by step she made her way downstairs. A dankness had washed in through the chimney, stale and sickening. She lit the lamp and carried it to the kitchen. From the window there, she saw Frank's lantern bobbing as he led the horse into the barn. She could not see man or horse, only the fading of the light until it disappeared inside. When it reappeared she lifted her kerosene lamp, a greeting to him. This time he came around the fence. She held the door against the wind.

"I've no time now, Sarah. I've work to do," he shouted. "He didn't come, did he?"

"No!"

"Is the phone working?"

She nodded that it was and waved him close to her. "Did the bus come through?"

"It's come and gone. Close the door or you'll have the house in a shambles." He waved his lantern and was gone.

She put the pot roast she had prepared for Gerald in the refrigerator and set the perishables close to the freezing unit. She wound the clock and put away the dishes. Anything to keep busy. She washed the kitchen floor that had been washed only the day before. The lantern across the way swung on a hook at the barn, sometimes moving toward the ground and back as Joyce examined the frames he was reinforcing.

Finally she returned to the living-room. She sat for a long time in Gerald's chair, watching the pattern of smoke in the lamp-chimney. Not even a dog or cat to keep her company. Not even a laughing piece of delft to look out at her from the mantlepiece; only the cold-eyed forebearers, whom she could not remember, staring down at her from the gilt frames, their eyes fixed upon her, the last and the least of them who would leave after her — nothing.

It was not to be endured. She lunged out of the chair. In the hall she climbed to the first landing where she could see Joyce's yard. He was through work now, the lantern hanging from the porch although the house was darkened. It was the only light anywhere, and swayed in the wind like a will-o'-the-wisp.

She bounded down the stairs and caught up her raincoat. Taking the flashlight she went out into the storm. She made her way around the fence, sometimes leaning into the wind, sometimes resting against it. Joyce met her in his driveway. He had been waiting, she thought, testing his nerves against her own, expecting her. Without a word, he caught her hand and led her to his back steps and into the house. "I've an oil lamp," he said then. "Hold your light there till I fix it."

She watched his wet face in the half-light. His mouth was lined with malicious humor, and his eyes as he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

squinted at the first flame of the wick were fierce, as fierce as the storm, and as strange to her. When the light flared up, she followed its reaches over the dirty wall, the faded calendar, the gaping cupboards, the electric cord hanging from a naked bulb over the sink to the back door. There were dishes stacked on the table where they no doubt stood from one meal to the next. The curtains were stiff with dirt, three years of it. Only then did she take a full glimpse of the folly that had brought her here.

"I just ran over for a minute, Frank . . ."

"A minute or the night, sit there, Sarah, and let me get out of these clothes."

She took the chair he motioned her into, and watched him fling his coat into the corner. Nor could she take her eyes from him as he sat down and removed his boots and socks. Each motion fascinated her separately, fascinated and revolted her. He wiped between his toes with the socks. He went barefoot toward the front of the house. In the doorway he paused, becoming a giant in the wierd light.

"Put us up a pot of coffee, dear woman. The makings are there on the stove."

"I must go home: Gerald . . ."

"To hell with Gerald," he interrupted. "He's snug for the night, wherever he is. Maybe he won't come back to you at all. It's happened before, you know, men vanishing from women they don't know the worth of."

Alone, she sat stiff and erect at the table. He was just talking, poisoning her mind against Gerald. How should she get out of here? Run like a frightened doe and never face him again? No, Sarah. Stay for the bitter coffee. Scald the giddiness out of you once and for all. But on top of the resolve came the wish that Gerald might somehow appear at the door and take her home. Dear, gentle Gerald.

She got up and went to the sink to draw the water for coffee. A row of medicine bottles stood on the window-sill, crusted with dust. Household remedies. She leaned close and examined a faded label: "Mrs. Joyce — Take immediately upon need."

She turned from the window. A rocker stood in the corner of the room. In the old days the sick woman had sat in it on the back porch, rocking, and speaking to no one. The stale sickness of her was still about the house, Sarah thought. What did she know of people like this?

He was threshing around upstairs like a penned bull. His muddy boots lay where he had taken them off, a pool of water gathering about them. Again she looked at the window-sill. No May wine there. Suddenly she remembered Dr. Philips's words: "Lived on stimulants for years." She could almost see the sour woman, even to her gasping for breath . . . "Take immediately."

Fix the coffee, Sarah. What kind of teasing is this? Teasing the dead from her grave before you. Teasing. Something in the thought disturbed her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

further . . . an association: Joyce watching her reach for the preserves last night, grinning at her. "Try it again, Sarah. You almost had it that time." And she could still hear him asking, "Which bottle?" Not which jar, but which bottle.

She grabbed the kettle and filled it. Stop it, Sarah. It's the storm, the waiting, too much waiting . . . your time of life. She drew herself up against his coming, hearing his quick steps on the stairs.

"Will you give us a bit of iodine there from the window, Sarah? I've scratched myself on those blamed frames."

She selected the bottle carefully with her eyes, so that her trembling hand might not betray her.

"Dab it on here," he said, holding a white cuff away from his wrist.

The palm of his hand was moist as she bent over it and she could smell the earth and the horse from it. Familiar. Everything about him had become familiar, too familiar. She felt his breath on her neck, and the hissing sound of it was the only sound in the room. She smeared the iodine on the cut and pulled away. His lips tightened across his teeth in a grin.

"A kiss would make a tickle of the pain," he said.

Sarah thrust the iodine bottle from her and grabbed the flashlight. "I'm going home."

His jaw sagged as he stared at her. "Then what did you come for?"

"Because I was lonesome. I was foolish . . ." Fear choked off her voice. A little trickle of saliva dribbled from the corner of his mouth.

"No! You came to torture me!"

She forced one foot toward the door and the other after it. His voice rose in laughter as she lumbered away from him. "Good Lord, Sarah. Where's the magnificent woman who rode to the winds with me last night?"

She lunged into the electric cord in her retreat, searing her cheek on it. Joyce caught it and wrenched it from the wall, its splayed end springing along the floor like a whip. "And me thinking the greatest kindness would be if he never came home!"

The doorknob slipped in her sweaty hand. She dried it frantically. He's crazy, she thought. Mad-crazy.

"You're a lump, Sarah," he shouted. "And Mr. Joyce is a joker. A joker and a dunce. He always was and he will be till the day they hang him!"

The door yielded and she plunged down the steps and into the yard. In her wild haste she hurled herself against the rig and spun away from it as though it were something alive. She sucked in her breath to keep from screaming. She tore her coat on the fence hurtling past it, leaving a swatch of it on the wire. Take a deep breath, she told herself as she stumbled up the steps. Don't faint. Don't fall. The door swung from her grasp, the wind clamoring through the house. She forced it closed, the glass plate tingling, and bolted it. She thrust the flashlight on the table and caught up the phone. She clicked it wildly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally it was the operator who broke through. "I have a call for you from Mr. Gerald Shepherd. Will you hold on, please?"

Sarah could hear only her own sobbing breath in the hollow of the mouthpiece. She tried to settle her mind by pinning her eyes on the stairway. But the spokes of the staircase seemed to be shivering dizzily in the circle of light, like the plucked strings of a harp. Even the sound of them was vibrant in her head, whirring over the rasp of her breath. Then came the pounding footfalls and Joyce's fists on the door. Vainly she signaled the operator. And somewhere in the tumult of her mind she grasped at the thought that if she unlocked the door, Joyce would come in and sit down. They might even light the fire. There was plenty of wood in the basement. But she could not speak. And it was too late.

Joyce's fist crashed through the glass and drew the bolt. With the door's opening the wind whipped her coat over her head; with its closing, her coat fell limp, its little pressure about her knees seeming to buckle them.

"I'm sorry," came the operator's voice, "the call was canceled ten minutes ago."

She let the phone clatter onto the table and waited, her back still to the door. Ten minutes was not very long ago, she reasoned in sudden desolate calmness. She measured each of Joyce's footfalls toward her, knowing they marked all of time that was left to her. And somehow, she felt, she wanted very little more of it.

For only an instant she saw the loop he had made of the electric cord, and the white cuffs over the strong, gnarled hands. She closed her eyes and lifted her head high, expecting that in that way the end would come more quickly . . .

"O"

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these swiftly-paced mystery-thrillers, all MERCURY PUBLICATIONS, are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "A Grave Case of Murder," by Roger Bax. Abridged edition. "Original and dramatic . . ." says *The Chicago Sunday Tribune.*

BESTSELLER MYSTERY — "The Kahuna Killer," by Juanita Sheridan. Abridged edition. ". . . fascinating . . . story carries genuine excitement and suspense," reports *The Saturday Review.*

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY — "The Blue Ice," by Hammond Innes. Abridged edition. "Excellent . . . Don't miss it," comments *The Saturday Review.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A PERFECTLY ORDINARY CASE OF BLACKMAIL

by A. A. MILNE

A STOUT, OLD-YOUNG MAN OF forty, Mr. Cedric Watherston of Watherston & Reeves, Solicitors, sat at his office table, knitting. He was not a good knitter, but he was proud of the fact that he could knit at all. He had learned when a prisoner of war in 1917, having walked straight into a German trench on his first journey up the line; and with the passage of years the circumstance of his capture had also become, in some odd way, a matter for pride. He liked sentences which began, "I remember when I was a prisoner in Holzminden." When a client was announced, he put the ball of wool, the needles, and the unfinished sock in the top left-hand drawer, smoothed his hair with both hands, and waited for the visitor to be shown in.

"Sir Vernon Filmer."

Mr. Watherston rose to shake hands with one of his most distinguished clients. "Glad to see you, Sir Vernon. You don't often give us the pleasure. On no unpleasant business, I trust?"

Sir Vernon did not look as if he were glad to see Mr. Watherston. He was a tall, fair, cold man, with pale-blue eyes, a prominent nose, and a small prim mouth. He was one of those natural politicians who are always conveniently there when ministerial posts are being given out. If there were to be ten knighthoods on New Year's Day for what could only be described as "public services," and nine had been decided upon, his name would come irresistibly to the mind for the tenth place.

"Cigarette?"

Sir Vernon waved it away. Mr. Watherston lighted one for himself, leaned back in his chair, remembered to put his fingertips together.

"I am being blackmailed," Sir Vernon said.

"Dear, dear, we must do something about that," said Mr. Watherston with an exaggerated calm which hid most of his emotions. Surprise was the least of these, for he had a dislike of politicians.

"That is naturally what I am expecting."

Mr. Watherston tried over a few sentences in his mind until he got the right opening. "Blackmail," he said delicately, "implies the previous commission, or alleged commission, of some offense. Offenses can be classified as offenses against the law, offenses against morality, and offenses against the social code. Perhaps, in this case, one should add political offenses. Which class or classes of

Copyright, 1948, by A. A. Milne

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

offense, Sir Vernon, does the threatened exposure allege?"

"Legal," said Sir Vernon, adding primly, "I have nothing whatever on my conscience."

Yes, yes, thought Mr. Watherston, but your conscience must be in pretty good training by now.

"To put it frankly, then, Sir Vernon, the blackmailer is threatening to reveal some action of yours which is punishable by law?"

"Yes. To put it with greater accuracy, if the truth had come out at the time, I might have been prosecuted, but need not necessarily have been convicted. I should think that today there was no possibility of conviction."

"When did this happen?"

"Nearly 40 years ago— 1909, to be exact."

"Ah! So it is the social and political consequences which really matter today?"

"Obviously. As they did, to an overwhelming extent, at the time. Do you not think it would be illuminating if I told you about it?"

Mr. Watherston held up a hasty hand. He had had no experience of blackmail, and he disliked the idea of being accessory after the fact to an apparently undiscovered crime. His mind wandered vaguely back to 1909, trying to think of the sort of contemporary illegalities in which Sir Vernon, then a young man of twenty-two, might have been mixed up. Having himself been a boy of twelve at the time, he came to no conclusion.

"Sir Vernon," he said. "It will be distressing for you to confide this story to anyone. Let us consider the matter on general lines for the moment. There are three ways of dealing with a blackmailer. The first is to submit to his demands."

Sir Vernon indicated what he thought of that.

"The second is to prosecute him. As you know, this can be done anonymously, under the disarming name of Mr. X."

Sir Vernon gave a short, unpleasant laugh.

"The only remaining method is to settle with the blackmailer out of court. I could pay his demands for you; I could instruct the prosecution for you. But frankly, Sir Vernon, I am not competent to get the better of a scoundrel whether by negotiation, threat, or personal violence." He let this sink in for a moment and then added, "Fortunately I know the man who is."

"Private detective or shady solicitor?"

"Solicitor. A shady solicitor in the sense that he usually acts for the submerged classes, but entirely loyal to his clients, whether prostitutes or Prime Ministers. And a very able man."

"You know him personally?"

"Oh, yes. The fortunes of war threw us together at Holzminden, where we happened to be prisoners."

"H'm," said Sir Vernon doubtfully.

"I understand your dislike of confiding in a stranger. Perhaps I should

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have added that he has very strong feelings about the detestable crime of blackmail. It is the one charge which he has always refused to defend in court — which is more than can be said for the whole of the bar. To get the better of a blackmailer he would go to the extreme length of his purse, his time, and — the law."

"Very well," said Sir Vernon. "I agree to accept your advice. I had better see this fellow in my own house at, say, nine o'clock this evening. Will you arrange that?"

Mr. Watherston made a note, saying, "His name is Scroope." He got up and held out his hand. "Perhaps you will let me know how the matter goes on. And if there is anything else I can do, Sir Vernon —"

They shook hands and went to the door together.

"Cold fish," thought Mr. Watherston, as he returned to his table. "One can't help disliking him. I wonder what he did."

He picked up the telephone. Afterward, there being nothing else to do, he went back to his knitting.

Being asked by an interviewer to what he attributed his success in life, Mr. Scroope replied, "My eyebrows." These had a natural quirk which seemed to express a good-tempered amusement with the world, and to admit his companion of the moment to an equal share in that amusement. "You and I," they seemed to say, "*we* know." It is doubtful if anybody had ever had a private joke with Sir Vernon, nor was he the man to wish to be on confidential terms with anyone less important than himself, least of all a shady solicitor; but even he recognized the eyebrows as evidence of a knowledge of the world. Mr. Scroope obviously knew his way about.

"A cigar, thanks," said Mr. Scroope. "Nothing to drink. Now then, Sir Vernon, Watherston tells me that you are being blackmailed. Who told *you?*"

"I don't understand," said Sir Vernon coldly.

"Dammit, one doesn't wake up in the morning and say, 'I've a sort of feeling that there are blackmailers about.' Something must have given you the idea."

"Naturally I had a letter," Sir Vernon said.

"Why 'naturally'? You might have had a telephone message. Is that the letter?"

Sir Vernon released it. "It came this morning through the post."

"H'm. Typed. Signed, 'Well-Wisher.' Humorous. D'you know who wrote it?"

"Not with any certainty."

"Five hundred in pound notes on Saturday as a guarantee of good faith, followed by 500 every six weeks. Sounds as if he wanted to get married. Well, that gives us six weeks before the second payment. Six weeks in which to think of something."

"You suggest I should pay the 500?"

"Oh, certainly. At least, *you* won't, I will. We'll keep you out of it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Read the rest of the letter."

"I have. You are given till Saturday to get the money; you are to communicate with nobody; you are to have your car waiting outside your door on Saturday morning, ready to drive yourself to a rendezvous which will be given you by letter before you start."

"Perhaps you are not aware that I am lunching at Chequers on Saturday?"

"Nobody tells me anything," said Mr. Scroope sadly. "But then, why shouldn't you? The food's quite good, I hear. And who could give you a better alibi than the Prime Minister?"

"You propose to keep the rendezvous yourself?"

"As Sir Vernon Filmer? Do I look like it? But I daresay I can find somebody who will pass for you at a distance. All you'll be asked to do, I fancy, is to leave the money in a certain spot, where the blackmailer will pick it up afterward. He's giving nothing away. Now then, he says, 'I have a letter written on board the *Ladybird* on September 15, 1909. Don't tell me you've forgotten it.'" He looked up. "Have you forgotten it?"

"No."

"Right. Then you'd better tell me."

"There were three of us on the *Ladybird* that summer afternoon: Robert Hayforth the owner, myself, and a local hand called Towers. We had been fishing close inshore. Hayforth, a powerful and devoted swimmer, had suggested a swim. The wind was freshening, the sea uninviting, and I stayed on board. Hayforth, whose idea of a swim was half a mile out and half a mile back, had been gone about ten minutes, when suddenly Towers came sidling up to me, his right hand behind his back. I'd never liked him, nobody in the place did, but he was a useful man in a boat, and Hayforth often took him on. He had a bottle in his hand, and he was holding it like a club. He — he accused me of" — Sir Vernon's face could still show disgust at the idea — " 'messing about with his wife.' "

"Were you?"

Sir Vernon looked at Scroope contemptuously, and went on: "I asked him what the devil he was talking about. I thought he was drunk. He said that when he had finished with me I'd have the sort of face that nobody's girl would want to mess about with. It was horrible. Such a foul weapon, and he was much more powerful than I. Hayforth was out of sight and hailing distance. I was at the man's mercy. It was his life or mine. I saw red."

He poured himself out a brandy and swallowed it quickly. In another moment, thought Scroope, all his past life will flash before his eyes. Why must politicians always talk in clichés?

"And you killed him," Scroope said. "How?"

"I don't know to this day how I did it. I seemed to be endowed with superhuman strength. Fear, I suppose,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and furious indignation at that loathsome weapon."

"You killed him, and you went on killing him. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"And when you had finished, it didn't look like self-defense, it looked like deliberate, premeditated, brutal murder. Is that right?"

"Yes, but it wasn't."

"It's what things look like which matter to the law. Well, and then Hayforth yelled, 'Ship ahoy!' and you helped him on board, and he saw the body and said, 'Lawks a mussy, what's all this?' And you told him. And he agreed to help you. Is that right?"

"Agreed on conditions."

"Ah, yes, now I'm seeing it. That letter was to him. Exonerating him and admitting sole responsibility. Why a letter? Couldn't he trust you?"

"If anything had happened to me, if the body had been washed up —"

"It would have been awkward for him. Because — stop me if I'm wrong — *he* was the man who had been messing about."

"Yes. I had had no idea of it, but I suppose there were other people who had guessed."

"So, when he had got the letter safely in his pocket, you put out to sea — the wind was freshening, you said — and it sounded sufficiently plausible to say that Towers had been washed overboard. No attempt to save him?"

"It blew up into a gale, and we didn't pick up our moorings until three o'clock next morning; we put the accident at just after midnight. In the dark, in that weather, with only two of us to work the boat, what could we have done? We nearly followed him as it was. I never expected to see land again."

"Convincing. And no suspicions by anybody?"

"None that I heard of. Towers was a thoroughgoing rascal. Nobody missed him."

"Not even his wife?"

"She least of all." Sir Vernon cleared his throat and added, "I should explain that my whole career was in the balance at this time, and that I had no other course open to me. I had just left Oxford with unusually brilliant prospects —"

Scroope picked up the letter. "D'you think this is Hayforth, Sir Vernon?" he asked.

"It might be, of course. Equally, I suppose, he might be dead, and somebody might have found my letter among his papers. I lost sight of him in the war, and haven't heard of him since."

"That sort of man?"

"Obviously not in those days," said Sir Vernon somewhat stiffly, "or he wouldn't have been my friend. But he was always a reckless fellow, and might have been knocked about by the war, have fallen on hard times, and slowly sunk to — this. The war," said Sir Vernon, who had fortunately missed it, "did not improve people's characters."

"Is there anything in this letter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which indicates knowledge not contained in your letter to Hayforth?"

"I don't think so."

"For instance, why should it be taken for granted that you can drive your own car? Lots of people can't."

For the first time that evening Sir Vernon looked at Scroope with respect. "That's true," he said thoughtfully.

"Were you driving a car at that time?"

"My wife gave me a Rolls as a wedding present a few months later."

"I congratulate you. Driven Hayforth in it?"

"Probably. I saw something of him up to the war."

Scroope got up and threw the end of his cigar into the fire. "Obviously we must find the man first. I shall sleep here on Friday night, so as to be with you when your instructions come." He took a notebook and pencil from his pocket. "Turn your head to one side, I want the profile." He began to draw. "About five feet eleven inches, aren't you? I think I've got just the man. Muffled and goggled, of course, which is what anyone would be who was keeping a date with a blackmailer. My man — Dean is his name — will come in the back way at eight o'clock on Saturday morning. With a false mustache. This is going to be fun. There, that's not bad." He held the drawing up and admired it. "Thank God, it's money he wants."

"What else are blackmailers ever after?" asked Sir Vernon contemptuously.

"Seats in the Cabinet," said Mr. Scroope. "The way I'm going to work, that would have made it more difficult."

On Saturday morning at 8:30, Sir Vernon stepped nervously from his front door and walked across to his garage. It was a chilly February morning, and even for that short distance he thought it well to wear a thick, fawn traveling coat and a checked cap. He brought his car round to the front door and left it there. Mr. Scroope and breakfast were waiting for him in the morning room.

"Now then, Sir Vernon," Mr. Scroope said, his mouth full of omelette, "let's get down to it. You are to be at the fifth milestone between Wellborough and Chiselton at 12:30. You say you know the road. How?"

"It was near Chiselton that Hayforth kept his boat."

"Good. How long would it take you to get there?"

"Three hours."

"Then Dean must take three hours. He's just arrived; we'll have him in directly, and you can show him the place on the map. What's the country like?"

"Quite flat. No houses, no trees, no possibility of concealment, as I remember. A long, almost straight road."

"Dean will hide the money behind the milestone — nothing elaborate, just enough not to catch the eye of a passer-by. Then he'll drive on, turning off at Chiselton and coming back to London another way. Obviously,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the blackmailer will be a little way behind him up to the milestone. He may be outside the house now — he was in London last night to post the letter — in which case he'll follow your car down. Dean, in your coat and cap, will be good enough for him."

Sir Vernon had picked up the letter again, and was studying it. "You talk of 'him' all the time," he said. "Does it not occur to you that it is more likely to be the work of a gang?"

"With a mastermind at the center of the spider's web?" said Mr. Scroope hopefully.

"I gather," said Sir Vernon coldly, "that you think otherwise."

Scroope pushed the toast away, and spoke seriously. "I'll tell you what I think," he said, "and then I'll tell you my plans. You're paying for this treat, and you're entitled to know. I think that if two young men go out in a boat for a summer afternoon's offshore fishing and bathing, they will not be wearing oilskins. I think that if one of them has just had a desperate fight for his life, any letter which he writes immediately after, with a shaking hand and under the stress of great emotion, will be uncharacteristic and only just legible. I think that if a small boat, manned by two people in flannels, is fighting a gale for eight hours, the occupants will not merely be wet, but soaked literally to the skin. And I think that after it's all over, and now that the unexpected storm has removed all possibility of suspicion, Mr. Robert Hayforth will find a piece of sodden paper in his pocket with not a single decipherable word on it, will wonder what the devil it is, and then throw it away with a laugh at the ridiculous caution which inspired it. What that piece of paper would have looked like 30 years later baffles the imagination. In short, Sir Vernon, you may be quite certain that the blackmailer is Hayforth himself, and that it is only his word against yours."

Sir Vernon permitted himself a little enthusiasm. "But that is most satisfactory, Mr. Scroope. You relieve my mind considerably."

"Yes, but even so, he can be extremely mischievous. So, since blackmailers are better out of action, I propose, with your financial assistance, to put him out of action."

"Now that we know who he is —"

"We don't. We only know who he was: a face and a name of 30 years ago. That doesn't help. But this letter shows that he is sticking to familiar ground. It is probable that he is living in the district, and almost certain that he has a car. Ever studied history?"

"I got a first in history in my finals at Oxford," said Sir Vernon.

"Pooh, I don't mean that sort of dead-alive history. Real history. Criminal history. Ever studied the Lindbergh case?"

There was no need to wait for an answer, Sir Vernon's delicate shrug had given it.

"What it came to in the end was that they knew all about the man except who he was. However, he had the ransom notes — numbers taken, of course — and one day he would use

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them. That was their only hope of getting him. But how? Every gasoline station in the neighborhood was given a list of the notes, and told to write down secretly on the back of any ten-dollar bill paid in exchange for gas the number of the car which was filled. Then the list of ransom notes could be consulted at leisure in the evening."

"Most ingenious. And now you have taken the numbers of the notes?"

"Of course. And I shall go down to Wellborough this afternoon, and make arrangements. Not being official, it will cost money. But by the time we've made the second payment to Hayforth, I shall know what he's calling himself and where he lives. I'll tell you something else. He says that he will give you the second rendezvous on March 25, and that it will be in an entirely different part of the country. It won't. If his plan works successfully today, as I mean it to do, he will repeat it exactly. It leaves you just as uncertain until the last moment, and saves him the trouble of looking for an equally convenient place."

"And when you've found him?"

"Then," said Mr. Scroope with a happy smile, "the real fun begins."

When a man calling himself Mr. Richard Hastings was arrested for possessing and passing forged notes, he did what all intelligent prisoners do. He sent for Mr. Scroope.

"Well," said Mr. Scroope, twinkling at him, "what's the story, Mr. Hastings?" He looked at the man with interest, summed him up as a gentleman gone to the bad, and offered him a cigarette.

"Thanks. I've been arrested, the Lord only knows why, for —"

"Yes, I know the police story, now I want to know yours."

"I swear to you that I am —"

"— absolutely innocent. Naturally. But we still need a story to explain why a quantity of forged notes was found in your safe, and why several others which had been passed in the neighborhood were traced to you. What is that story?"

"They were planted on me."

"By whom?"

"Some enemy, I suppose."

"I see. What about the notes in circulation which have been through your hands?"

"They must have gone through many hands. Why pick on me?"

"Obviously because you had such a large store of them in your safe. We want a better story than you're giving me, Mr. Hastings."

"I can't tell you anything better."

"Then," said Mr. Scroope politely, "I will wish you good morning." He got up. "Just one word of advice, if I may. The story which you will be telling to some other solicitor need not be true; but it must sound sufficiently like the truth to allow him a temporary hallucination that it was possible." He held out his hand with a smile.

Richard Hastings waved the hand away. "Wait," he said. "You'd better

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have it. I found the damned things."

"That's better. Where?"

"Oh, hidden under a stone."

"You know, I don't think that that will quite carry conviction — using the word 'conviction' in its less technical sense, of course. It must have been rather a moment in your life when you found such a large packet of notes. You would be expected to remember the historic spot."

"Oh, well, if you want the exact place, it was behind the fifth milestone on the Wellborough-Chiselton road."

"You counted — and remembered?"

Richard Hastings looked up angrily. "What the devil do you mean? It said, 'Wellborough, 5 miles,' didn't it?"

"You were looking behind milestones for something?"

"I happened to sit down there. Convenient to lean against for a few minutes. I noticed that the ground was disturbed, and investigated."

"And said, 'Hallo, what's this?' "

"Exactly."

"And what was it?"

"A parcel of one-pound notes. Damned odd, I thought."

"And so you decided to steal them?"

"What's that?"

"You wish to plead guilty to an alternative charge of stealing by finding. Is that right?"

"Right!" Hastings said suddenly. "I stole them. That's not very serious, is it? Well, now you've got the truth."

"It's odd," Mr. Scroope said, "that a man, driving along the Wellborough-Chiselton road on a cold and frosty morning, should stop at precisely the fifth milestone, lean against it rather than against the cushions of his car."

Richard Hastings jumped to his feet, and said angrily, "What's all this? You trying to trap me?"

"I'm trying to do," said Scroope mildly, "what counsel for the prosecution will do much more thoroughly."

"Sorry. I see the point; but naturally" — he gave an awkward little laugh — "I'm a bit upset about the whole thing. But I do absolutely swear, and it's gospel truth, that I didn't know that the notes were forged, and that I found them precisely where I said I did."

"Oh, come, we must tell them a little more. When you happened to find them."

"I can't remember the exact date."

"Which date can't you remember?"

Mr. Richard Hastings wiped his forehead with the back of his hand and said, "I haven't the vaguest idea what you're talking about."

"I want the date which you can't exactly remember, when you got out of your car, leaned against the fifth milestone, and accidentally found a packet of notes. Just a rough guess."

"The first week in February."

"About seven weeks ago. The first forged note which came to hand was paid to the Lion Garage at Chiselton

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on February 18. So that fits nicely. Now what about the second date? When you again got out of your car, leaned against the fifth milestone, and accidentally found a second packet of notes."

Mr. Richard Hastings licked his lips. "What makes you think I did that?"

"Two parcels were found in your safe. One, opened, contained about 450 forged notes. The other, unopened — or, possibly, opened, examined and tied up again — contained 500."

"I can explain that. It's all coming back to me. The parcel which I found —"

"In the first week in February?"

"Yes. It was really two parcels, done up together. I counted the top one and it was 500. I was forgetting for the moment about the other parcel, which I didn't open. Obviously there was another 500 in that. Making the 1000, as you were saying. Silly of me."

"Not at all. Very natural. Then all that we have left to explain," said Mr. Scroope cheerfully, "is why the inner wrapper of the second parcel was a sheet of *The Western Morning News* dated March 24 — six weeks later."

Robert Hayforth banged the table with his hand, and cried, "Blast him, he's framed me! The sniveling devil!"

"Sniveling —? Who is he?"

"The Right Honorable Sir Vernon Filmer." He dragged the words out sneeringly. "All right, you've got it. It was hush money. He killed a man, murdered him; that's your smug, hypocritical Right Honorable. You want me to tell the truth in court. Right, I'll tell it — and we'll go down together."

Mr. Scroope got up. "I've chosen never to defend blackmail cases. Everything which you have told me is, of course, in the strictest confidence, and I now fade out of the case. I warn you, the penalty for blackmail is, next to that for murder, the severest known to the law. Any written evidence which you may have had against Sir Vernon Filmer will be in possession of the police, and you will not be permitted to use it. An unsupported accusation made in your defense would only make your case worse and your punishment more severe. If you take my unprofessional advice, you will plead 'Not Guilty' to the present charge, give no evidence, and leave it to your counsel to suggest that in some way you are the innocent victim of a conspiracy."

He picked up his hat and went to the door. "Oh, by the way," he added, "if it gets about, though I don't see why it should, that I declined this case, it will not prejudice the court against you." The eyebrows went up in that humorous quirk of his. "It may even do you good. There is an absurd legend in legal circles that I defend only the guilty."

Mr. Cedric Watherston picked up the telephone and said, "Watherston here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Busy?"

"Just turning the heel."

"Anyone listening in?" the voice said.

"My dear fellow!"

"Right. Then I thought you would like to know that your honorable friend is relieved of all anxiety for five years."

"Fancy! I do congratulate you. I was reading an interesting case this morning, forging and passing and all that sort of thing, and oddly enough — but, of course, it's only a coincidence."

"I expect so. A respectable family lawyer really shouldn't read criminal cases."

"It just caught the eye. Ah, what do you think will happen at the end of the five years?"

"I think that you will lose a distinguished client, and the country a distinguished servant. Quite suddenly."

"Ah! I was fearing the same thing myself." Mr. Watherston chuckled. "You know, you're a very naughty man. Here was a perfectly ordinary case of blackmail and there is hardly a crime in the calendar which you have not committed in order to bring the blackmailer to justice. If," he added, "you know what I mean by justice."

"Well, you see," the voice said apologetically, "I don't *like* blackmailers."

"Neither do I."

"Comes to that, I don't like Sir Vernon Filmer."

"How right you are," said Mr. Watherston cheerfully.

SPECIAL BINDER OFFER

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE has in stock a supply of strong, handsome binders for your copies of *EQMM*. Each binder holds one complete volume — that is, six issues of the magazine. It is easy to use, handy, convenient and economical. The price is $1.50 postpaid. Send your order and remittance to: Special Binder Dept., Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A fresh, breezy, and really delightful story by Peter B. Kyne who not so long ago was one of America's most popular magazine writers . . . And we have news for you: at the time of this writing we are negotiating with Mr. Kyne for what may prove to be a series of his stories. Remember that grand old character, Cappy Ricks? Wouldn't it be something to have Cappy Ricks play detective in the pages of EQMM?

MEMORY TEST

by PETER B. KYNE

THE DAY AFTER MY PROMOTION TO sergeant I transferred to Central Station and reported to the chief of police for assignment. Another new sergeant was also reporting and the chief said, "Goldberg, meet Mannix, Timothy J. Mannix; Isidore M. Goldberg." Then he handed us the shields of detective sergeants and told us to report to Captain Moroney, chief of detectives upstairs.

"What sort of man is he?" Mannix asked with almost childish insouciance. "A patient man, I hope, who will not expect too much from a pair of rookies."

"He's as hard as rocks, Sergeant, but just; and if there's a better detective anywhere I have never heard of him. He's a driver. You'll know many a straight 48-hour shift on a murder detail and you'll learn to forget about your day off — if you make good."

Mannix and I exchanged long looks and I agreed with him when he grinned and said, "I'll not deny that there are ignorant Mannixes and Goldbergs, but I have yet to meet them plain stupid." He put an arm across my shoulders. "Let us go up, Goldie, and endear ourselves to this tough but just chief of detectives."

When he called me Goldie I knew I wanted to be paired with him on any detail we got. As we went upstairs, I remarked that we'd be a good pair to draw to; that each would have something to contribute that the other lacked. To that he replied: "I see no objection to a man's thinking well of himself. Self-esteem should not be confused with self-conceit, and I'm delighted to be a detective because I *know* I'll make good." He gave me a slap on the back and we barged in on Moroney and found a big, fine-looking specimen of second-growth Irish with dark blue, kindly eyes and a mouth that shut like a cellar door. We came to attention, saluted and as if we'd rehearsed it, said in unison, "Rookies, sir." Then Tim jerked a thumb at me. "Goldberg, sir." He

Copyright, 1949, by Crowell-Collier Publishing Co.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prodded himself in the chest. "Mannix."

"I knew you were coming," Moroney said coldly.

There were visitors' chairs but Moroney did not ask us to be seated, so with a sigh, Timothy J. Mannix eased himself into one and I, not wishing to render Tim conspicuous, sat down in the other.

"In this office," Moroney said, "you sit when you're asked to. No lounging here."

"Goldie," Tim replied cordially, "is descended from the last king of Judea, while I trace my line back, in unbroken succession, to King Cormac of Connaught. We stand in no man's presence."

Moroney's eyes burned like headlights but what could he do about it? Tim had not violated a police regulation, but had merely yielded to the pixie in him to deflate Moroney, who to cover his confusion pointed to a framed motto on the wall. We read:

The Real Detective Has No Heart. He Never Gives a Known Criminal An Even Break.

There was also on the wall the framed photograph of a very handsome young man in the uniform of a lieutenant commander. Below his wings he had a number of ribbons, and one of them meant the Medal of Honor. So we knew this was Moroney's son and that Moroney wasn't averse to advertising the fact that he'd sired one of the finest.

I glanced from the photograph to Moroney. "I note a family resemblance, Chief," I said, hoping to remove some of the curse of Tim's behavior.

"My son, Sergeant Goldberg, and my only son. Thank God he's intact."

"God bless him," said Tim. "He did the impossible. He added luster to a race that doesn't need it. Isn't he the handsome lad? Is he married?"

"No," Moroney replied, "but he's engaged to the loveliest girl in all the wide world, and it's the happy man I am about that, because I'll have grandchildren to delight my old age that will be as much of a credit to the country as Johnny has been. Have you two any children?" he asked kindly.

I have two, a boy and a girl, age ten and eight respectively and I got their photos out of my billfold and passed them over to the chief. "Nice kids," he remarked. "No marriage is worth a damn without children. Now that you're a sergeant you can afford another."

Tim, too, had two youngsters and got out snapshots of them. "Both their parents are black Irish," he complained. "Black as far back as we can trace us, but those two are redheads and where the hell they got that I'd like to know."

"I can tell you," Moroney shot at him. "I think 'twas in the Eighth Century that the Danes came down and kicked hell out of us and ravaged and raped. So there's a bar sinister in your clan, Mannix, and put that in your pipe and smoke it, you of royal descent."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That squared everything, so Moroney said, "Go up to the Rogues' Gallery and report to the curator, Corporal Gillogley, for a two weeks' course studying the mugs and records of our most undistinguished citizens, both in the poky and out of it. Your success as detectives will depend on whether you have the memories of elephants or gophers. At the end of two weeks Corporal Gillogley will give you a memory test. The passing grade is 70, and 60 plus will get you two assigned to the shoplifting detail."

We walked into Moroney's office uninvited, two weeks later, and laid our report cards before him. Mannix had 86 plus and I had 86. "Gillogley says we broke a track record," Mannix proclaimed sweetly.

Moroney telephoned Gillogley to verify the score, so we knew he could be just as big a stinker as either of us. "I'll pair you," he announced then. " 'Twould be no service to the department to separate two such brilliant intellects." He reached for a typewritten memo on his desk. "Here's your first assignment. There are no clues on this case, but if you two are as smart as you think you are that shouldn't bother you. Over the telephone I've discovered who pulled the job, but I'm hoarding that information. Unless you two tell me in two hours the name of the man, out you go on your well-known fannies."

"The harder the case to crack the more joy in the cracking," said Tim. "The impossible jobs are cold meat for Mannix and Goldberg. Read the assignment to me, Goldie."

I read:

At 1:15 this morning Mrs. Herbert Mills de Grandcourt, who resides at the Hotel St. Dunstan, was knocked out in the drawing-room of her suite and robbed of jewels insured with Lloyd's of London for $200,000. Case assigned to Goldberg and Mannix.

Tim said, "We could locate the culprit over the telephone but a ride up to the Hotel St. Dunstan this fine spring morning will be good for our metabolism."

In the elevator Tim said, "We're driving the hardboiled man crazy and he's called our bluff. Wirra, wirra, 'tis whistling past the cemetery I am."

We went up to see Mrs. Herbert Mills de Grandcourt and found her in bed suffering from shock and sock. She was about 70 and homely as a chimpanzee, and the thought of the old bag decking herself out in a fortune in jewels induced some saddening thoughts on human vanity. Later Tim confided he had had a similar thought and didn't much care whether we got her stuff back or not. Our sole concern, really, was in making good with Moroney.

It developed the old lady had got her jewels out of her safe-deposit box to wear to a party she was giving to friends the opening night of the opera. After the opera she had taken her guests to a fashionable night club, returning to the St. Dunstan at 1:10.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Just as she was inserting the key in the lock of her drawing-room door somebody socked her from behind and when she came to, she was on her bed, and it was nine o'clock. From the knockout she'd just drifted off to sleep. She telephoned the management, which telephoned the police, and here we were on the job at ten o'clock. We got a meticulous description of the loot and discovered all of it had once belonged to her grandmother.

On our way downstairs to question the help, Tim said, "That crook was an amateur. This job wasn't premeditated."

"The jewels are antiques," I reminded him. "The early afternoon editions must be on the streets now with their description and no pawnbroker will take a chance on stuff so hot it's readily recognizable. If, as you think, this fellow is an amateur, the possession of those jewels will be nothing but a source of worry to him until he can find a fence sufficiently well financed to take the stuff off his hands — and that's going to take some time."

"We'll find him," said Tim confidently, "then tail him to the fence and acquire great merit with Moroney."

First we asked the house engineer if anybody in his department had been working late on the sixth floor, for we were pretty certain an employee had done the job. He said an outside plumber had. A bride had dropped her engagement ring down the drain of the washbasin in Room 605. Since the bridal couple were leaving on their honeymoon early the next morning, and as the house plumber was home sick, the engineer had telephoned a master plumber to send one of his men down. So the master plumber had roused one out and the man had reported at twelve; the house engineer had taken him to the room and indicated the job and left him there with the occupants.

When asked to describe the plumber, the engineer said he had not asked the man's name but that he was a tall, hulking fellow about 45 with a nose that seemed to be oversize anyway, and was bulbous and red, as if he had a disease in it.

We'd had all we wanted out of the engineer, so we went to the telephone pay station in the lobby and called up Moroney. Tim, still playing the braggart to irritate Moroney, said, "Mannix speaking, sir. Goldie and I know the lad that took the crown jewels, and we're an hour and a quarter under your deadline."

"M'm. Who is he?"

"Big Nose Lafferty, sir."

"I doubt it. Big Nose is a reformed drug-store bandit, and the last thing he'd do would be to prowl a hotel."

"Him and his schnozzle came up in Professor Gillogley's memory test. I admit that five years ago his specialty was sticking up drug stores. While he was serving his second term, acne developed in his beezer and when he realized his radiant bulbous snoot made a marked man of him, he de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cided to be a plumber." Tim then explained the connection between plumbing and the crown jewels.

"And what do you do next?" Moroney demanded.

"We've decided there's no hurry about picking Big Nose up. In a moment of weakness he robbed the old lady and now the loot's an embarrassment to him until he can find a fence strong enough to buy it from him. We'll tail him until he contacts the fence, then bring them both in."

"Take the day off," said Moroney. "And I wouldn't be surprised if you two developed into the common or garden variety of dick, provided you do not die of the swelled head in the interim."

Big Nose was fifteen days lining up an Honest John rich enough to do business with. An Honest John is, in underworld slang, a fence or receiver of stolen goods. By day Lafferty'd work at his trade but when he came home to his room and washed up, Tim or myself followed him to dinner, and then through a section of the city where he'd be likely to find somebody to help him in his quest. On a Saturday morning he took a taxi to 60 Market Street, and there a very well-dressed, handsome man about 50-years old came out and got into the cab with him. I got out and Tim followed the taxi in his own old jalopy.

He returned in about half an hour. "That highly respectable man is the fence," he announced, "and is he the fox, making his deal in a taxi? I'm sure Big Nose didn't have the stuff with him, but I'm satisfied the trade will be closed today. Such deals are for cash and the fence went down into the safe-deposit vault of the Central Bank and came up with a paper-bound parcel. He's on his way back now."

While Tim was looking for a parking spot I watched the entrance to 60 Market Street and presently the fence walked into the lobby, paused at the cigar stand there to buy a package of cigarettes, and entered the elevator. I said to the cigar clerk, "Who is that handsome, distinguished-looking gentleman who bought the cigarettes?"

"That," said the clerk, "is Mr. Gerald C. Conklin — one of the smartest men in the real-estate business in this city."

"How come?"

"He's a specialist. Trades only in foreclosed properties. If it's a house and lot he paints the house and puts it in nice condition and sells it. I bought a very nice little home from him quite cheap."

His office was posted on the directory 342-344, but just to be sure, I cased it, then returned to the building lobby. When Tim joined me we hung around the entrance an hour before Big Nose arrived, on foot, in his working clothes and carrying a leather bag full of tools. We went up with him, he turned right, we turned left into the right-hand corridor; in a minute we came back and waited at the elevator bank half an hour; when Big Nose came out and punched the bell I put my gun in his ribs and his big hands went up automatically.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A stairway ran from the top floor to the lobby, following the elevator well, so we took him down to the second landing where we could give him a private frisk. He wasn't armed and he didn't have the money on his person, so we looked in his tool bag and there it was.

We decided Conklin would be much too smart to keep that hot stuff in his office; in all probability he would take it somewhere else immediately. So I stayed on guard while Tim handcuffed Big Nose Lafferty, took him down to the jalopy and up to Central Station, where he booked him on suspicion of robbery, then beat it over to the City Hall and talked a search warrant out of the D.A.

He rejoined me in the lobby. Conklin was still up in his office, so we went up to find the jewels and make the pinch. We turned in at the general office and found Conklin there talking pleasantly with a young man and a girl. His stenographer sat at her desk in a corner. Conklin came to the counter and politely inquired our business and, not wanting to embarrass him by stating our business and doing our job in the presence of his visitors, Tim said we were just a pair of homeless guys looking for a bargain in homes. The cigar clerk downstairs had referred us to him.

"Please come in," said Conklin, and led us into his private office. "Be seated, gentlemen. I'll be engaged in the other office for about five minutes, but make yourselves comfortable."

He went out, closing the door behind him — and in less than a minute we had the De Grandcourt jewels and were gazing out the window when Conklin rejoined us.

"At the moment, gentlemen," he announced, "I haven't a thing. I had a sweet little house this morning but have just given it to my daughter and her fiancé for a wedding present. You saw them in the outer office as you entered."

"And a very handsome couple, I thought," said Tim, always ready with a bit of blarney at the right moment. He stepped over to Conklin's desk, on which were rather large portraits, in silver frames, of two women — one a stately lady in the middle-forties and the other, obviously, the girl we had seen as we came in. He turned to Conklin. "I hope you're furnishing the house for her, too."

"I am. Now, I expect to have two houses for sale in about 60 days and if you will leave me your names, addresses, and telephone numbers I'll be glad to get in touch with you so you can take a look at them."

We gave him the desired information and he wrote it down and we left. Fifteen minutes later we walked into Moroney's office and Tim tossed the package of money on the chief's desk. "We haven't opened it, sir, but we think it's money," he announced. "We remembered you verified our report cards when Gillogley graduated us, so we thought best to have you open that package and count the jack."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Irish," Moroney snarled, as if speaking of an alien race, "can forgive but it would kill them to forget."

He counted $20,000 in century notes, done up in $1000 packets. "Ten per cent of the insured value," he murmured. "Big Nose did rather well for a three-minute job. Where is he?"

"In the poky upstairs, booked on suspicion of robbery."

"Why suspicion? He's guilty and you can prove it, can't you?"

"It's only a temporary booking," I defended. "We thought Big Nose might want to make a deal with the D.A. and if we booked him on suspicion it would be easier to turn him loose after he'd served his purpose. We feel a little sorry for Big Nose, because for the past five years he's run straight and the De Grandcourt job wasn't premeditated. He happened to finish his plumbing job and emerge into the hotel corridor in time to see the old lady pass him. There were no witnesses and he was tempted beyond his strength. We thought you might consider giving the big boob a break. We think he's more than a little simple."

"I think the same of you and Mannix." He pointed to his motto. "Read it again."

"We read that brutal creed once," Mannix replied. "That's enough." He laid the De Grandcourt jewels on the desk. The chief glanced at them casually and asked, "Who's the Honest John?"

"We've forgotten his name and address."

"So you would compound a felony, eh?" Moroney hinted.

I thought it was my turn to tackle him. "At least we don't hide our softness behind a ferocious front. Since the old lady is going to get her jewels back and we think we've frightened Big Nose and the Honest John into permanent reform, why can't you be charitable, spring Big Nose and forget the Honest John? Isn't that better than bringing shame and heartbreak to four decent people?"

"I know exactly how you feel, Goldberg." Moroney's patience was amazing. "When I was a detective sergeant I never put the cuffs on a man in high place without I felt like throwing up. 'Twas like dynamiting the statue of a hero. How did this John act when you caught him with the goods?"

"He doesn't know we've found them."

"I was never a man that fancied crossword puzzles. Give me the story from start to finish."

I told him the story up to the moment we had found ourselves alone in the fence's office — and why. Then Tim took over. "Of course, Chief, we take a quick gander around the office and on a window sill we see a row of potted plants. Goldie is fond of flowers so he steps over for a closer look. Then he says, 'Tim, what do you make of this?' and pointed to a pot. It was a green-painted tin pot like the others, but in the loam around the plant little green shoots showed, proving grass seed had been mixed with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the loam and had sprouted recently — say four days ago. No similar sprouts showed in the other pots nor did the loam in them indicate that it had been disturbed.

"The pot had a bead around the rim," Tim continued, "and I picked it up and examined it and may I never see the back of my head if Goldie doesn't spot it for a phony! There are two pots — the outside pot doing duty as an envelope for the inside pot, and it has no bead on the rim so the rim can fit up snug under the bead of the inner pot. Between the bottoms of both pots there's a space, and there we found the crown jewels."

Moroney was generous. "Brilliant work," he said. He reached for the telephone directory, thumbed through it, and called a number. When the call was answered it's a wonder our hair didn't stand straight up like a dog's when he scents danger. "Mr. Conklin, please," said Moroney smoothly. Then Conklin came on the wire. "Listen, Conklin," Moroney said. "We have a corpse in the morgue. We can't identify the man but he had one of your business cards in his pocket, so will you hop a taxi and come up immediately. Maybe you can identify him . . . thanks."

Moroney hung up. "There was only one amateurish touch in your operation. You didn't clear through me when you, Mannix, asked the District Attorney for the search warrant. That's customary, because the D.A. has to be very careful about issuing search warrants, particularly at the request of a dick he has never seen before. He has to be convinced there's sufficient reason to warrant it — and, unfortunately for you two, he knows Conklin. They belong to the same club and often play bridge together. So he telephoned me to confirm it and I did."

Moroney picked up the telephone again and we heard him say, "Spring Big Nose Lafferty. That suspicion of robbery charge won't stick. But send him down to my office — and give him a guide to make certain he gets here."

He had his secretary bring in two more chairs and when Big Nose reported merely pointed to one. There we sat in the most dreadful silence until Gerald C. Conklin came breezing in. "Hello, Mike," he said — and then his glance rested on the De Grandcourt jewels on Moroney's desk and he turned green and almost fell into the vacant chair.

Moroney ignored him. He pointed to the bundle of greenbacks and said, "Count that, Lafferty." Lafferty counted. "Twenty grand," he said.

"Give it back to Conklin."

Big Nose obeyed and Moroney said, "Lafferty, aren't you ashamed of yourself for socking an old lady?"

Big Nose started to sniffle. "I sure am," he confessed. "I might have killed the old frail."

"A word of advice to you, Lafferty. Save your plumbing money and after you're 65 you'll be able to live on your nest-egg, plus your Social Security. I realize the De Grandcourt

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

job wasn't premeditated. Fate just handed you an easy one — and you forgot how easy it would be to pin the job on you. So be on your way, but keep your nose clean and your mouth shut, or I'll frame you. Don't forget you're a two-time loser and the third time at bat means a home run for you."

"Now I've seen everything," Big Nose blubbered. "Honest cops with golden hearts." He gave Moroney a dirty paw and Moroney shook it cordially and Big Nose went back to his job. As the door closed behind him Moroney walked over to Conklin and gave him a vicious backhand slap across the mouth that lifted him out of his chair, and as he lay groveling on the floor Moroney kicked him half a dozen times in the seat of the pants. Then he opened the door, took the Honest John by the collar, and threw him out into the corridor.

He returned to his desk. "How did you discover my son is engaged to marry that swine's adorable daughter?" he asked. "There has been no announcement."

Tim explained and I added, "After seeing the photograph we recognized the original. We have the memories of elephants, not gophers."

"But why? You don't like me —"

"Oh, yes, we like you," said Tim. " 'Twas just that we found fun needling a man hiding his softness behind a defense mechanism and thinking he could fool us. So we played the smart aleck."

"You conspired to commit a felony."

"Oh, the hell with that," said Tim airily. "The sin is in being caught. In a way we were loyal to the job, but why not be loyal to the chief, too? Besides, sir, we decided we owed your son something. We couldn't have lived with ourselves if we'd given the lice of the world the opportunity to say: 'See that young man? His father is our local chief of detectives, but his father-in-law is a convict.' "

Moroney looked up at Johnny's photograph; then he got up and tore the framed motto down, broke it across his knee, and tossed the pieces into his wastebasket. So we knew he'd turned felon to keep the world from hurting the son he loved.

Tim and I could understand that, for we have sons, too. As Moroney put his arms down on his desk and laid his head on them and we saw his shoulders heave, we tiptoed out, for when a man like Moroney weeps for his lost honor he prefers to weep alone.

Watch EQ on TV

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

. . . a study in what the author calls "word savagery" — the old "Black Mask" magic compounded of terse, hard-hitting prose; violent action — fists and bullets and knockout drops; stark details of cruelty and pain; delayed-bomb meaning; and tough, hard-as-nails characters who have a code all their own — a code as ruthless as a doublecross and as sentimental as honor among thieves . . .

V. MARKS THE SPOT

by LESTER DENT

THE FISH SHOOK ITS TAIL AS THE knife cut off its head. Red ran out of the two parts and the fluid spread enough to cover the wet red marks where two human hands had failed to hold to the dock edge.

Oscar Sail wet the palm of his own left hand in the puddle.

The small policeman kept coming out on the dock, tramping in the rear edge of glare from his flashlight.

Sail split the fish belly, shook it over the edge of the yacht dock, and there were some splashes below in the water. The stuff from the fish made the red stain in the water a little larger.

When the small policeman reached Sail, he stopped and gave his cap a cock. He looked down at Sail's feet and up at Sail's head.

The cop said, "Damned if you ain't a long drink of water."

Sail said nothing.

The cop asked, "That you give that yell a minute ago?"

Sail showed plenty of teeth so that his grin would be seen in the moonlight. He picked up the fishhook and held it close to his red-wetted left palm.

"Little accident," he said.

When the cop put light on the hand, Sail tightened the thumb down and made a wrinkle in the palm. Red was squeezed out of the wrinkle and two or three drops fell on the dock. It was enough like seepage from a cut the fishhook might have torn that Sail went on breathing.

"Hook, eh?" the cop said vaguely.

He put the toe of his right shoe into the fish head's open mouthful of snake-fang teeth.

"Barracuda," he added, not sounding as if that was on his mind. "They don't eat 'em in Miami. Not when you catch 'em in the harbor, anyhow."

Sail's laugh did not go off so well and he turned it into a throat clearing.

He said, "People get hot ideas."

The policeman did not say anything and began spearing around

Copyright, 1936, by Pro-Distributors Publishing Co.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with his flashlight beam. He poked it over the edge of the dock at one of the fish organs floating on the stained water. He held it there for what seemed a year.

After he finally began pointing the beam at other places, the light located the bugeye. The bugeye was tied at the end of the dock with springlines. Sloping masts were shiny and black, and black canvas covers were on the sails. The hull looked black, neat, new.

The cop dabbed his light up and down each of the two bugeye masts and asked, "Yours?"

Sail said, "Yep."

"What you call that kind of a boat?"

Sail began talking heartily about the boat.

He said, "Chesapeake Bay five-log bugeye. She is thirty-four feet long at the waterline and forty-five overall. Her bottom is made out of five logs drifted together with Swedish iron rods. She has twelve-foot beam and only draws a little over two feet of water with the centerboard up. A bugeye has sloping masts. You tell 'em by that, and the clipper bow they always put on them. They're made —"

"Yeah," the cop said. "Uh-huh."

He splashed light on Sail.

Sail would have been all right if he had been a foot or two shorter. His face would never wear a serious look successfully. Too much mouth. Sun and salt water was on its way to ruining his hair. Some of the black had been scrubbed out of his black polo shirt and black dungarees. Bare feet had long toes. Weather had got to all of the man a lot.

The policeman switched off his light.

"That was a hell of a funny yell," he said. "And damned if you aren't the tallest thing I ever saw."

He stamped his feet as he walked away.

Sail shut and opened his eyes slowly and by the time he got rid of the effects of the flashlight, the officer was out of sight on shore.

Sail held both hands out about a foot from his eyes. There was enough moonlight for him to see them. A slight breeze made coolness against one side of his face. Loud music came from the Take-a-Sail-in-the-Moonlight-for-a-Dollar-a-Couple boat at the far end of the City Yacht Basin, but a barker spoiled the effect of the music. Two slot machines chugged alongside the lunch stand at Pier Six.

After he had watched his hands tremble for a while, Sail picked up hook, line, fish, knife, and got aboard the bugeye.

Sail, name of the bugeye, was in white letters on the black life preservers tied to the mainstays.

Sail grasped a line, took half hitches off a cleat, and pulled a live-box made of laths partly out of the water. Some crawfish, crabs, and two more live barracuda were in the live-box. He cut the line close to the live-box and let the weighted box sink.

The tiny cabin of the bugeye had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

headroom below for a man of ordinary height. Sail had to stoop. The usual gear was neatly, in places cleverly, stowed in the cabin.

Sail popped the fish into a kettle in the galley, hurrying.

With the point of the fishhook, he gouged a small place in his left palm, making faces over the job.

He straightened out the stuff in the tackle locker enough to get rid of signs that a hook and line had been grabbed out in haste.

After he had washed and held the mouth of an iodine bottle against the gouge, he looked out of the hatch.

The young policeman was back where the fish had bled and was using his flashlight. He squatted and picked up the fish head. He squeezed it and got fresh blood out of it. After a while, he stood up and approached the dock end. When his flashlight brightened the bugeye's dark sloping masts and black sail covers, Sail was at the galley, making enough noise cutting up the fish to let the cop know where he was and what he was doing.

Sail let four or five minutes pass before he put his head out of the hatch and looked. Perspiration had made the back of his polo shirt moist by then.

The cop had gone somewhere else.

Sail was still looking and listening for the policeman when he heard a man yell and a woman curse.

The woman said, "Stinker!" and more that was worse.

The man's yell was just a yell.

The sounds came out of Bayfront Park, which lay between the yacht basin and Biscayne Boulevard.

Sail got out on deck and stretched his neck around. He saw a man run among the palms in the park. The man was alone.

Then the small policeman and his flashlight appeared among the palms. During the next five minutes the policeman and his flashlight were not motionless long enough for him to have found anything.

Sail dropped into the bugeye cabin and stripped naked, working fast. His body looked better without clothes. The hair on it was golden and long, but not thick. He put on black jersey swim trunks.

Standing in the companion and looking around, his right hand absently scratched his chest. No one was in sight.

He got over the side without being conspicuous.

The water had odor and its normal quota of floating things. The tide was high slack, almost, but still coming in a little. Sail swam under the dock.

The dock had been built strongly because of the hurricanes. There was a net of cross timbers underneath, and anything falling off the south side of the dock would be carried against them by the tide.

Sail counted pilings until he knew he was under the place on the dock where he had used the fish. He began diving and groping around underwater. He was quiet about that.

He found what he was seeking on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sixth dive. He kept in the dark places as he swam away with it.

One of the little islands in the harbor seemed to be the only place that offered privacy. He made for it.

The island — an artificial half-acre put there when they dredged the City Yacht Basin — was a heap of dark silence when Sail swam tiredly to it. Pine trees on the island had been bent by the hurricanes, some uprooted. The weeds did not seem to have been affected.

Sail tried not to splash coming out of the shallows onto the sand beach. He towed the Greek under water as long as possible.

Two stubborn crabs and some seaweed hung to the Greek when Sail carried him into the pines and weeds. The knife sticking in the Greek, and what it had done, did not help. Weeds mashed under the body when Sail laid it down.

Pulpy skins in the Greek's billfold were probably greenbacks, and stiffer, smaller rectangles, business cards. Silver coins, a pocket knife, two clips for an automatic. The gun was in a clip holster under the left armpit of the corpse.

Inside the Greek's coat lining was a panel, four inches wide, five times as long, a quarter of an inch thick, hard and rigid.

The Greek's wrist-watch ticked.

Sail put the business cards and the panel from the coat lining inside his swim trunks, and was down on his knees cleaning his hands with sand when the situation got the best of his stomach. By the time he finished with that, he had sweated profusely and had a headache over the eyes.

He left the Greek on the island.

The water felt cold as he swam back towards the bugeye, keeping in what dark places he could find. The water chill helped the headache.

Having reached the bugeye with the stuff still in his swim trunks, he clung to the bobstay, the chain brace which ran from the bow waterline to the end of the long bowsprit. He blew the brackish bay water off his lips quietly and listened.

There was no sign anywhere that he had been seen or heard.

He made himself sink and began feeling over the parts of the dock which would still be under water at low tide. Everything under water was inches thick with barnacles and oysters.

He found a niche that would do, took the stuff out of his trunks and wedged it there tightly enough so that there was not much danger of it working out.

Sail clung to the bugeye's bobstay until all the water ran off him that wanted to run, then scrambled aboard and ducked into the cabin.

He had started to shed the bathing suit when the woman said, "Puh-lease!"

Sail came up straight and his head thumped a ceiling carlin.

She swung her legs off the forward bunk. Even then, light from the kerosene gimbal lamp did not reach more than her legs. The feet were small in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dark blue sandals which showed red enameled toenails. Her legs had not been shaved recently, and were nice.

Sail chewed an imaginary something between two eye-teeth while he squinted at the girl. He felt his head where it had hit the ceiling. Two or three times, he seemed about to say something, but didn't, and went forward into one of the pair of small single staterooms. The shadow-embedded rest of her did not look bad as he passed.

He shut the stateroom door and got out of the swim trunks. He tied a three-pound fish sinker to the trunks and dropped them through a porthole into the bay, which was dredged three fathoms deep here. He put on his scrubbed dark polo and dungarees.

The girl had moved into the light when he opened the door and entered the cabin. The rest of her was interesting. Twenty something, he judged.

She smiled and said, "You don't act as if you remember me, Wesley."

Sail batted his eyes at her.

"Gosh," she said, "but you're tall!"

Sail scratched behind his right ear, changed his eyebrows around at her, gave the top of his head three hard rubs, then leaned back against the galley sink. This upset a round bottle. He caught it, looked at it, and seemed to get an idea.

He asked, "Drink?"

She had crossed her legs. Her skirt was split. "That would be nice," she smiled.

Sail, his back to her, made more noise than necessary in rattling bottles and glasses and pinking an opener into a can of condensed milk. He mixed two parts of gin, one of crême de cocoa, one of condensed milk. He put four drops from a small green bottle in one drink and gave that one to the girl, holding it out a full arm's length, as if bashful.

They sipped.

"It's not bad without ice, Wesley," she murmured.

Sail said, "Thanks, lady," politely.

Her blue handbag started to slip out of the hollow of her crossed legs and she caught it quickly.

"For a husband, you're a darn polite cuss," she said.

Sail swallowed with a distinct pigeon noise. "Eh?"

"My Gawd, don't you *remember?*"

"What?"

"If this isn't something! Two weeks ago Tuesday. Four o'clock in the morning. We were pretty tight, but we found a justice of the peace in Cocoanut Grove. You had to hock the engagement ring with the jeep for his fee and $20, and we all went out and had some drinks, and I kind of lost track of things, including you."

"I'll be —" Sail said vaguely.

The girl put her head back and laughed. The mirth did not sound just right.

"I don't know what to do," she said. "I remembered you said you were a jewelry drummer out of Cincinnati. I sat around the hotel. Then I began to get mad."

An unnaturalness was growing in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her voice. She pinched her eyes shut and shook her head. Her blue purse slid to the floor.

"I'm here to tell you I had a time locating you," she said. "I might have known you would be a sailor. Gawd, imagine! Anyway, Mama is right on deck now, Mister, and I want something done about it. If you think you're not the man, you're going to have to prove it in a big way."

"You want me to prove my name, business, and recent whereabouts? Is that it?"

"You bet."

Sail said, "That's what I figured."

She peered at him, winking both eyes. Then fright grabbed her face.

"You ain't so smart!" she said through her teeth.

She started to get up, but something was wrong with her knee joints by now, and she slid off the bench and sat hard on the black battleship linoleum.

Sail moved fast and got his long fingers on the blue purse as she clawed it open. A small bright revolver fell out of the purse as they had a tug-o'-war over it.

"Blick!" the girl gasped.

Blick and a revolver came out of the oilskin locker. The gun was a small bright twin to the girl's. Blick's panama fell off slick mahogany hair, and disarranged oilskins fell down in the locker behind him. Blick had his lips rolled in until he seemed to have no lips. He looked about old enough to have fought in the last war.

"Want it shot off?" he gritted.

Sail jerked his hand away from the girl's purse as if a bullet were already heading for it. He put his hands up as high as the cabin carlins and ceiling would allow. The upper part of his stomach jumped slightly with each beat of his heart, moving the polo shirt fabric.

The girl started to get up, couldn't. She said, "Blick!" weakly.

Blick, watching Sail, threw at her, "You hadda be a sucker and try that married-when-you-were-tight gag to find out who he is!"

The girl's lips worked with some words before they got out as sounds. ". . . know he — doped drink."

Blick gritted at Sail, "Bud, she's my sis, and if she don't come out of that, I wouldn't wanta be you!"

Sail watched the bright gun. Sweat had come out on his forehead.

"She'll be all right," he said.

"What'd you give her?"

"Truth serum."

"You skunk! Fat lot of good it'll do you."

Sail said nothing.

Blick ran his eyes up and down Sail, then said, "They sure left the faucet on too long when they poured you, didn't they, bud?"

Sail got his grin to operate. He said, "Let's see if some words will clear this any."

Blick said, "That's an idea, bud. I think I got you figured. You're some guy Andopolis rung in. It was like Andopolis to get himself some help."

"Andopolis was the one who got knifed?" Sail asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You ain't that dumb."

"Was he?"

"Naw. That was Sam, my pal."

Sail rubbed the top of his head. "I'm sort of confused."

"You and us both," Blick said. "We're confused by you. We ain't seen you around before today. But me and Nola and Sam are watching Andopolis, and he starts out on this dock. You're the only boat out here, so it's a cinch he wanted to see you."

"He only made it about halfway out the dock," Sail said dryly.

"Sure. Sam headed him off. Sam wanted to talk to Andopolis was all —"

"It wasn't all," Sail drawled. "What Sam really wanted was to make Andopolis tell him something. Andopolis had some information. Sam wanted it. Sam told Andopolis that if he didn't cough up on the spot he would get his guts shot out, or words to such effect. Sam reached for his gun. But he had made the mistake of not unbuttoning his coat before he started the argument. Andopolis knew exactly where to put a knife. Sam went off the dock after he gave just one yell."

"And that brought the cop."

Sail squinted one eye. Perspiration was stinging it. He echoed, "And that brought the cop."

Blick was holding the gun steady. He said, "Andopolis ran before the cop got here. He hid in the park and Nola and I tried to get him later, but he broke away and ran."

"Then you came here."

Blick grinned thinly. "Let's get back to the time between the knifing of Sam and the arrival of the cop. You, bud, done some fast work. You were sweet, what I mean. You got a hook and line, grabbed a live fish out of your live-box, jumped on the dock, and butchered the fish to hide the marks where Sam got it. You even got the insides of the fish into the water to hide any bloodstains where Sam sank. Then you fed the cop a line when he got there."

"You sure had your eyes open," Sail said.

"Did the cop go for your story?"

"I'm still wondering," Sail said thoughtfully.

Blick watched Sail. "How much do you know?"

Sail got rid of his grin. "I'll bite. How much?"

"So you're going to start that," Blick said.

Nola was breathing noisily. Blick pointed at her, said, "Help me get her going."

Sail grasped the girl and lifted her.

"Stay that way," Blick ordered, then searched Sail, found no weapon, and said, "Out."

Sail walked the girl up the companionway and onto the dock, then started to let go the girl and get back aboard.

"Along with us," Blick ordered. "It'd be swell if Andopolis has told you what we're trying to find out, wouldn't it?"

Sail said nothing. His breathing was as audible as the girl's. Blick got on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the other side of the girl and helped hold her up.

"We're tight, see?" Blick said. "Stagger."

They staggered along the dock to the sidewalk, and along that.

Yacht sailors stood in a knot at the end of the Pier Six lunch stand, and out of the knot came the chug of the slot machines. Blick put his hand and small revolver into a coat pocket. They turned to the right, away from the lunch stand.

Sail said, "You might have the wrong idea about me."

"We'll go into that, bud," Blick said. "We'll go into that in a nice place I know about."

They scuffed over the sidewalk and Blick, walking as if he did not feel as if he weighed more than a ton, seemed to think of a possibility which pleased him.

"Hell, Nola! This guy covered up that knifing for Andopolis, so he's got to be with Andopolis all the way."

Nola did not answer. She was almost sound asleep. Blick pinched her, slapped her, and that awakened her a little.

A police radio car was parked at the corner of Biscayne Boulevard and the street they were traveling. Blick did not see it in time. When he did discover it, he took his breath in with a sharp noise.

"We're drunk," Blick warned. "Taking each other home."

Sail shoved a little to steer the girl to the side of the walk farthest from the prowl car. Blick shoved back to straighten them up. He also got mad.

Blick's gun was in his coat pocket, and if shooting started, it was no time for a gun to be in a pocket. Blick started to take it out, probably intending to hold it at his side where it could not be seen from the police car.

Sail watched the gun start out of the pocket. It had a high front sight and there was an even chance of it hanging on the pocket lining. It did.

Sail shoved Blick and Nola as hard as he could. The force of the effort bounced him toward the police car. He grabbed the spare tire at the back of the machine and used it to help himself around.

A policeman in the car yelled, "What the hell's this?" He wasn't excited.

Blick did not shoot. He got Nola over a shoulder and ran. A taxicab was on its stand at the corner. Blick made it.

Sail shouted, "Kidnapers!"

One of the cops leaned out, looked at him, said, "Huh?"

Blick leaped into the taxi with his sister. An instant later, the hack driver fell out of his own machine, holding his head. The taxi took off.

"They stole my heap!" the taxi-driver shrieked.

The police-car starter began whining, and the motor started. An officer stuck his head out of the car, said, "Stick around, wise guy!" and the machine left in pursuit of the cab.

Sail, who had the legs for it, ran away from there very fast.

When he reached the Pier Six lunch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stand, he planted his hip against the counter, and caught up with his breathing. A young man came over, swiped at the counter with his towel, got a look at Sail, blinked and wanted to know, "How's the weather up there?"

"Dry," Sail said. "What you got in cans?"

Sail drank the first and second cans of beer in gulps, but did some pondering over the third. When it was down, he absent-mindedly put three dimes on the counter.

"Forty-five," the youth corrected. "Cans is fifteen."

Sail substituted a half-dollar and put the nickel change in one of the slot machines, still involved with his thoughts. The one-armed bandit gave him a lemon and two bars, another bar just showing.

"Almost a jackpot," someone said.

"History," Sail said, "repeating itself."

A telephone booth was housed at the end of Pier Four. Sail dialed the O and asked for Police Headquarters.

The slot machines chugged at the lunch stand while he waited. A card on the phone box told how to report a fire, get the police, or call an ambulance. He read part of it, and Headquarters answered.

Sail said, "I want to report an attempted robbery. This is Captain Oscar Sail of the yacht *Sail*. A few minutes ago a man and a woman boarded my boat and marched me away at the point of a gun. I do not know why. I feel they intended to kill me. There was a police car parked at the corner of Biscayne, and I broke away. The man and woman fled in a taxi. The officers chased them. I do not know whether the officers have reported yet."

"They have."

"Did they catch the pair?"

"No."

Sail almost said that was what he had called to find out, but caught himself in time.

"It might help if you described the pair," the police voice said.

Sail described an imaginary couple that were not like Blick and Nola in any particular except that they were man and woman.

"Thanks," said the voice at Headquarters. "When you get aboard your boat, tell Patrolman Joey Cripp to give us a ring. I'm Captain Rader. You'll probably find Patrolman Cripp on your boat."

Sail was wearing a startled look as he hung up and felt for a nickel in the coin return cup of the telephone.

Three men were waiting in the cabin of *Sail* when Sail got there. Two wore police uniforms, the other had civilian clothes.

One policeman was using his tongue to lather a new cigar with saliva. The tongue was coated. His neck had some loose red skin on it. He was shaking, not very much, but shaking.

The second officer was the young, small patrolman. He still had his flashlight.

The man in civilian clothes was putting bottles and test tubes in a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scuffed leather bag which held more of the same stuff and a microscope off which much of the enamel had been worn. His suit was fuzzy gray, rimless spectacles were pinched tight on his nose, and he had chewed half of the cigar in his mouth without lighting it. The cigar was the same kind the policeman with the shakes was licking.

Sail said, "Captain Rader wants Patrolman Joey Cripp to call him."

"That's me," the young patrolman said, and started for the companionway.

"Wait a minute," Sail said. "You didn't happen to get a look at a man and a woman who left here with me a while ago?"

"I sure did. I was behind a bush in the park." The young officer went out.

The shaking policeman got up slowly, holding his damp cigar and looking miserable. He took a full breath and started words coming.

"You sure are a tall man," he said. "I'm Captain Cripp and Joey is my son. This is Mister Waterman. You have a wonderful boat here. Some day I am going to get me a boat like this and go to the South Seas. I want to thank you for reporting your trouble to Captain Rader, which I presume you have just done. And I want to congratulate you on your narrow escape from those two. But next time, don't take such chances. Never fool with a man with a gun. We'll let you know as soon as we hear anything of your attacker and his companion. They got away from the radio car. I hope you have a good time in Miami, and no more trouble. We have a wonderful city, a wonderful climate." He shook with his chill.

Captain Cripp pulled out another cigar and a shiny cylindrical metal lighter. He took another breath.

"Smoke? Of course you do. Better light it yourself. I shake like a leaf. I've got malaria, and every other day I shake. That's an excellent cigar, if I do say so myself. One of our native products. Made right here in Miami, and as mild as an old maid's kiss. There! Didn't I tell you it was a good cigar?"

He took back his lighter. He did not touch the bright metal where Sail had held it and made fingerprints.

"Isn't admission charged to this?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, you are naturally puzzled. Forget it. It means nothing at all. It's just an idea Captain Rader got after talking to Joey about a yell and a fish."

Patrolman Joey Cripp jumped aboard and came below.

"Captain Rader offers his apologies for sending us aboard your boat in your absence," Joey said, "and he wonders if you have anything you would like to say to us."

Sail, his scowl getting blacker and blacker, gritted, "I'm making an effort not to say it!"

Joey said, "Well, Mister Sail, if you will excuse me, we will be going."

The rabbity man, Waterman, finished putting things in his bag and picked up a camera with a photoflash attachment, pointed the camera at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sail. The outfit clicked and flashed.

"Thank you," he said, not very politely.

They left.

Sail threw the cigar overboard, then examined the cabin. Almost everything had been put back in place, but in one spot he found enough fingerprint powder to show they had printed the place.

Sail tried to sleep the rest of the night. He did get a little. The rest of the time he spent at the companion with a mirror which he had rigged on the tip joint of a fishing rod so as to look around without showing himself.

Boats at a slip do not usually have an anchor watch. But on a big Matthews at the opposite slip, somebody seemed to be standing at anchor. The watcher did not smoke, did not otherwise allow any light to get to his features. He might have been tall or short, wide or narrow. The small things he did were what any man would do during a long tiresome job.

There was one exception. The watcher frequently put a finger deep in his mouth and felt around.

Sail took a shower with the dock hose. It gave him a chance to get a better look at the Matthews. The watcher of the night was not in evidence.

The *Sail's* dinghy rode in stern davits, bugeye fashion, at enough of a tilt not to hold spray. Sail lowered it. He got a brush and the dock hose and washed down the black topsides, taking off dried salt which sea water had deposited. He dropped his brush in the water at different times. In each case, it sank, and he had to reach under for it.

The fourth time he reached under for the brush, he retrieved the stuff which he had taken off the Greek. The articles had not worked out of the niche between the dock cross braces under water, where he had jammed them.

Sail finished washing down, hauled the dink up on the davits, and during the business of coiling the dock hose around its faucet, looked around. Any of a dozen persons in sight might have been the watcher off the Matthews. The others would be tourists down for a gawk at the yachts.

He spirited the Greek's stuff below with the scrub brush.

One of the cards said Captain Santorin Gura Andopolis of the yacht *Athens Girl*, chartered for Gulf Stream fishing, nobody catching more fish. The address was Pier Five.

The other 26 cards said Captain Sam Dokomos owned the Lignum Vitae Towing Company. An address and a telephone number for day calls only.

There was also a piece of board four by twenty inches, a quarter of an inch thick, mahogany, with screw holes in four corners. The varnish was peeled, rather than worn, as was some of the gold leaf. The gold leaf formed a letter and four figures — K 9420.

Sail burned everything in the galley stove.

There was no one in the telephone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

booth at the end of the pier. He looked up the number of Pier Five, which was no more than 200 feet distant, and dialed it.

"Captain Andopolis," he requested.

Through the window he could see them go looking for Captain Andopolis. It took them almost five minutes to decide they couldn't find him.

"Maybe he went to the dentist," the one who had hunted suggested.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. He's been having a toothache, somebody said."

Sail went back to the bugeye and put on a dark suit, tropical weight, a black polo shirt and black shoes. His shore cruising rig.

The cafeteria was overdone in chromium. The Negroes who carried the trays were dressed in the same red that was on the walls. There were a score of customers and a boy who wandered among the tables selling newspapers and racing sheets. He sold more dope sheets than papers.

One man eating near the door did not put syrup on his pancakes or sugar in his coffee. When he finished, he put a finger in the back of his mouth.

Sail finished his beer and doughnuts and strolled around the corner to a U-Drive-It.

The only car on which they did not want a deposit was a little six-cylinder sedan, not new. Sail drove it around, sticking his head out frequently to look for a tall building. He found it, parked in front of it, and then went inside. He told the elevator operator loudly, "Five!" before they started.

The fifth-floor corridor was empty.

When the man who had felt his tooth in the cafeteria came sneaking up the stairs, Sail was set. He had his belt strapped tight around his fist. The man got down on all fours to mew his pain. Sail hit again, then unwrapped the belt, blew on his fist, worked the fingers.

He had the senseless man in his arms when the elevator answered his signal.

"Quick! I gotta rush my friend to a doctor," he explained.

He drove five or six miles on a side road off the Tamiami Trail before he found a lonesome spot and got out. He hauled the man out.

The man began big at the top and tapered. His small hands were calloused, dirt was ground into the callouses, the nails broken. His face was darker than his hair.

A leather wallet held three hundred in old and new bills. There was $1.61 in change and the cashier's slip for his cafeteria breakfast in his trousers.

A knife was in a holster against the small of his back. It was flat and supported by a high belt. Sail threw it in the canal at the roadside. It was not the one with which he had knifed Sam. He had left that one in his victim.

Handfuls of water from the canal did not speed his revival much. When he finally came around, he groaned, squirmed, and started feeling his bad tooth again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sail stood back and showed him a fat blue revolver. "Just try to be nonchalant, Andopolis," he advised.

Andopolis immediately stood up.

"Sit down!" Sail directed sharply.

Andopolis walked towards him.

Sail shoved the gun out, gritting desperately, "This thing is loaded, you fool!"

Andopolis leaped. Sail dodged, but hardly enough. Andopolis hit him with a shoulder. The impact spun him. Since he didn't want to shoot, the gun was a handicap. It tied up his fists. Andopolis hit him on the belt buckle. Numbness grabbed the whole front of his body. Something suddenly against his back was the ground.

"Yah!" Andopolis screeched. "Yah!"

He jumped, feet together, at Sail's middle. Sail was too numb to move clear. The feet hit his chest, everything seemed to break, and red-hot pain knocked the numbness out. Sail got Andopolis's legs, jerked. Andopolis windmilled his arms, but fell.

Sail clamped onto one of the man's feet and began doing things to it and the leg. Andopolis, turning over and over, raised a dust cloud. He moaned and bellowed and made dog noises. When he judged Andopolis was dizzy enough, Sail pounced on the dust cloud. He hit, variously, an arm, the ground, a hip, and other places which he could not identify.

Andopolis, bewildered and with dirt in his eyes, failed to get his jaw out of the way.

Sail straightened, put back his head and started to take a full breath. He began coughing. Hacking, gagging, holding his chest, he sat down in the road. He began to sweat profusely. After a while he pulled up his shirt. There was one purple print of the entire bottom of both of Andopolis's feet, and his chest was skinned, the loose skin mixed with the long golden hair. There was not much blood.

Andopolis got his eyes open and snarled, "Yah! I stomp you good if you don't lay off me!"

Sail coughed and got up. He kept his feet far apart, but did not teeter much.

He said thickly, "My Macedonian friend, you stood anchor watch on me all night and you were still trailing me this morning. Where do you get that lay-off stuff?"

"Before that, I'm talk about," Andopolis growled.

Andopolis took a breath and blew words out. "For two week now, you been follow me like dog. I go to Bimini two day, and you and that black bugeye in Bimini before long. I make the run from Bimini here yesterday. You make him too. Vat you take me for? One blind owl, huh?"

Sail asked, "Do you think you're bullet-proof, too?"

Andopolis snorted. "Me, I don't theenk you shoot."

"What gave you that idea?"

"Go jump in hell," Andopolis said.

Sail coughed some, deep and low, trying to keep it from moving his ribs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He said, "All right, now that we're being honest with each other, I'll tell you a true story about a yacht named *Lady Luck*. That's just so there won't be any misunderstanding about who knows what."

Andopolis crowded his lips into a bunch and pushed the bunch out as far as he could, but didn't say anything.

Sail began: "The *Lady Luck*, Department of Commerce registration number K 9420, was as neat a little yacht as ever kedged off Featherbed Bank. She belonged to Bill Lord of Tulsa. Oil. Out in Tulsa, they call Bill the Osage Ogre, on account of he's got what it seems to take to find oil. Missus Bill likes jewelry, and Bill likes her, so he buys her plenty. Because Missus Bill really likes her rocks, she carries them around with her. You following me?"

Andopolis was. He still had his lips pursed.

"Bill Lord had his *Lady Luck* anchored off the vet camp on Lower Matecumbe last November," Sail continued. "Bill and the Missus were ashore, looking over the camp. Bill was in the trenches himself, back when, and is some kind of a shot in the American Legion, so he was interested in the camp. The Missus left her pretties on the yacht. Remember that. Everybody has read about the hurricane that hit that afternoon, and maybe some noticed that Bill and his Missus were among those who hung on behind that tank car. But the *Lady Luck* wasn't so lucky, and she dragged her picks off somewhere and sank. For a while nobody knew where."

Sail stopped to cough. He had to lay down on his back before he could stop, and he was very careful about getting erect again. Perspiration had wet most of him.

He said, "A couple of weeks ago, a guy asked the Department of Commerce lads to check and give him the name of the boat, and the name of the owner, that carried the number K 9420. That was the mistake."

"Pooey," Andopolis said, "on your story."

"The word got to me," Sail continued. "Never mind how. And it was easy to find out you were the lad asking for the dope on K 9420. Inquiry brought out that you had had a fishing party down around Matecumbe and Long Key a few days before you suddenly got curious about K 9420. It was a little harder to locate the parties who had your boat hired at the time. Two Pan-American pilots. They said you anchored off Lower Matecumbe to bottom fish, and your anchor fouled something, and you had a time, and finally, when you got the anchor up, you brought aboard some bow planking off a sunken boat. From the strain as it was torn loose, it was apparent the anchor had pulled the planking off the rest of the boat, which was still down there. You checked up as a matter of course to learn what boat you had found."

Andopolis looked as if something besides his tooth hurt him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Tough you didn't get in touch with the insurance people instead of contacting Captain Sam Dokomas, a countryman of yours who had a towing and salvage outfit, and a bad reputation."

Andopolis growled, "Damn! You said somethin' then!"

Sail kept his voice lower to decrease the motion of his ribs in expelling air for words. "You needed help to get the *Lady Luck*. But Captain Sam Dokomas tried to make you cough up the exact location. Then you smelled a doublecross, got scared, and lit for Bimini.

"I had been hanging around all this time, and not doing a good job of it, so you got wise to me. That scared you back to Miami. You had decided on a showdown, and were headed for my boat when Captain Sam collared you on the dock. You took care of part of your troubles with a knife right there. But that left Captain Sam's girl friend and her brother, Blick and Nola, or whatever their names are. They were in the know. They tried to grab you in the park after you fixed Sam up, but you outran them.

"Now, that's a very complete story, don't you think? Oh, yes. You got reckless and jumped me a minute ago because you figured I wouldn't shoot you because nobody but you knows the exact location of the *Lady Luck*. The two Pan-American boys fishing down there with you when you found the ship forgot to take bearings and didn't have a smell of an idea where they were at the time."

Andopolis was a man who did his thinking with the help of his face, and there was more disgust than anything else on his features.

"You trying to cut in?" he snarled finally.

"Not trying. Have."

Andopolis thought that over. The sun was comfortable, but mosquitoes were coming out of the swamp around the road to investigate, hungrier than land sharks.

"Yeah," Andopolis muttered finally. "I guess you have, at that."

"Let's get this straight, Andy. You and I, and nobody else."

Andopolis nodded. "Okay."

"Now just who is this Blick?"

"Nola's brother."

"Now, Andy —"

"And Nola was married to that doublecrosser, Sam."

Sail made a whistling mouth. "So it was Nola's husband you dirked. She'll like you for that."

"So what? She didn't go for him much."

"No?"

"Naw. That dame —"

"Skip it," Sail said suddenly. He put his shirt on, favoring his chest. "Dang, feller, you sure busted up my ribs. We've got to watch the insurance company. They paid off on Missus Bill's stuff. Over a hundred thousand. They'll have wires out."

Andopolis nodded. "What about stuff for diving?"

"There's sponger equipment aboard my bugeye," Sail said. "I tried that racket over in Tarpon Springs, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you can't compete with those Greeks over there."

"Let's go," Andopolis said.

He was feeling his tooth again when he got in the car. Sail drove slowly. The road, nothing more than a high dike built up with material scooped out to make the drainage canal, was rough. It hurt his ribs.

Sail had driven no more than half a mile when both front tires let go their air. Maybe the car would still have remained on the road. But bullets also knocked holes in the windshield. The car was in the canal before anything could be done about it.

The car broke most of its windows going down the canal bank. The canal must have been six feet deep. Its tea-colored water filled the machine at once. Sail's middle hurt, and he had lost his air, and had to breathe in, and there was nothing but water.

After the water had filled the car, it seemed to rush around inside. Sail tried the doors, but they wouldn't open. He did not touch Andopolis in his struggles. Andopolis did not seem to be in the car. Sail couldn't remember him having been thrown out.

The first window Sail found was too small. He pummeled the car roof, but hardly had strength enough to knock himself away from what he was hitting. Then he was suddenly out of the car. He didn't know just how he had managed it. He reached the top, but sank twice before he clutched a weed on shore, after which an attack of the spasms kept him at first from hearing the shots.

Yells were mixed in the shot noise. Sail squeezed water off his eyeballs with the lids, looked, and saw Andopolis on the canal bank. Andopolis was some distance away and running madly.

Blick and his sister Nola were running after Andopolis. They were shooting at Andopolis's legs, it seemed.

Then all three ran out of sight, but the sounds told Sail they had winged Andopolis and grabbed him.

Sail had wrenched some of the water out of his lungs by now. He swam to a bush which hung down into the water and got under it. He managed to get his coughing stopped.

Andopolis was sobbing at the top of his voice when Blick and Nola dragged him up.

"Shoot his other leg off if he acts up, Nola," Blick said. "I'll get our tall bud."

Sail began to want to cough. He desired the cough until it was almost worth getting shot for.

"He must be a submarine," Blick said. He got a stick and poked around. "Hell, Nola, this water is eight feet deep here."

Andopolis bubbled something in Greek.

"Shut up," Blick said, "or we'll put bullets into you like we put 'em into the tires of your car."

Andopolis went on bubbling.

"His leg is bleeding bad, Blick," Nola said.

"Hell I care! He knifed your husband, didn't he?"

Air kept coming up in big bubbles

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from the submerged car. Sail tried to keep his mind off the cough. Blick stood for a century on the bank with his bright little pistol.

"He musta drowned," Blick said.

Andopolis moaned.

"Didn't you know we had been shaggin' you all night and mornin'?" Blick asked him. "Hell, if you hadn't been so occupied with that long lean punk, you'd have got wise, maybe."

Nola said, "We better get his leg fixed."

"If he ain't free with his information, he won't need his leg any more," Blick said. "Let's get away."

Andopolis whimpered as they hazed him away. They apparently had a car in the bushes beside the canal some distance down the road. Its noise went away. Sail crawled out and had a good cough.

Captain Cripp looked wide-eyed and hearty and without a sign of a chill as he exclaimed, "Well, well, good morning, good morning. You know, we began to think something had happened to you."

Sail looked at him with eyes that appeared to be drained of everything but the will to carry on, then stumbled down the remaining three steps into the main cabin of *Sail*. He let himself down on the starboard seat. Pads of cotton under gauze thickened his neck and wrists. He had discovered the car windows had cut him. Iodine had run from under one of the pads and dried. He had just come from the hospital.

Young bony Patrolman Joey Cripp looked at Sail. His grin took the looseness out of the corner of his mouth.

"Tsk, tsk," he said. "Now that's terrible. You look a sight. It's a wonder you're alive. I hope that didn't happen in Miami."

Sail gave them a look of bile. "This is a private boat, in case you forgot."

"Now, now, I hope we can keep things on an amiable footing," Captain Cripp murmured.

Sail said, "Drag it!" His face was more cream than any other color. He reached behind himself in the tackle locker and got a gaff hook. A four-foot haft of varnished oak with a tempered bright steel hook of needle point. He showed them the hook and his front teeth. "I've got a six-aspirin headache, and things to go with it! You two polite public servants get out of here before I go fishing for kidneys!"

Patrolman Joey Cripp stood up. "I didn't think we'd have any trouble with you, Mister Sail. I hoped we wouldn't, on account of you acted like a gentleman last night."

"Sit the hell down, Joey," Captain Cripp put in. "Mister Sail, you're under arrest, I'm sorry to say."

Sail said, "Arrest?" He scowled. "On the level?"

"It sure is."

"Pop said it," agreed young Joey.

Captain Cripp shook a finger at Sail. He said: "Listen. Waterman found human blood in that fish mess on the dock last night. The harbor squad's diver went down this morn-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing. He found a bathing suit with a sinker tied to it. He also found a live-box with some live barracuda in it. It was a barracuda you butchered on the dock. The fishline you had in your hand when Joey got there was wet, but it don't take a minute to wet a line. You described a man and a woman that looked a lot different from the pair Joey saw you with. We been doing some arithmetic, and we figure you were covering up."

"Now," Sail said, "I guess I'm supposed to get scared?"

"I don't know," Captain Cripp said, "but a dead Greek was found over on the island this morning. And in your bathing suit which the diver got was some island sand, and some stickers off the pine trees that grow on the island."

"I guess," Joey said, "it does look kinda funny."

"I regret that it does," Captain Cripp agreed. "After all, evidence is evidence, and while Miami has a wonderful hospitality, we do draw lines, and when our visitors go so far as to use knives on —"

"Let's get this straight!" Sail put in. "Pine-tree stickers and sand are just about alike here and in Key West, and points between."

"You may be assured —"

Sail sprang up gripping the hook. He began to yell.

"What's the idea of this clowning? I know two lug cops when I see 'em. If you got something to say, get it off your chests."

Joey sighed. "I guess courtesy is somethin' you can't acquire. Whatcha say, Pop? Hell with the chief's courtesy campaign, huh?"

"Now that you mention it, Joey, okay." Captain Cripp pulled manacles out of his hip pocket. "We're gonna fan you into the can, and we're gonna work you over until we get the straight of this."

Sail slammed the gaff into a corner.

"That's more like it. If you hadn't tried to fancy pants around last night, I'd have showed you something then."

Sail shuffled into the galley and got the rearmost can of beer out of the icebox. It gurgled when he shook it, but that was because of the small sealed jar of water which fitted inside it. Stuffed around the jar were some sheets of paper. He held the documents out to the two policemen.

Joey raked his eyes over the print and penned signatures, then spelled them out, lips moving.

"Aw, this don't make no difference," he said. "Or does it?"

Captain Cripp complained, "My glasses fell off yesterday when I was having one of my infernal chills. What does it say, Joey?"

"He's a private dick commissioned to locate some stuff that sank on a yacht called the *Lady Luck*. The insurance people hired him."

Captain Cripp buttoned his coat, squared it over his hips, set his cap with a pat on the top. "Who signed the papers, Joey?"

Joey said, "They're all right, Pop. From what it says, I guess this private op is the head of something called

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marine Investigations. Reckon that's an agency, huh?"

Captain Cripp sighed and ambled over to the companionway. "Beauty before age, Joey."

Joey bristled. "Shamus or no shamus, it don't make no difference!"

"Let the next guy have the honor, Joey."

"Look, Pop —"

"The last private op I worked over got me two years in the sticks. He said something about me chiseling in on the reward, and the skipper believed him. It was a damned lie, except — well — out, Joey."

"But Pop, this stinker —"

"Out!" Captain Cripp barked. "You're as big a fool as your maw!"

Joey licked his lips, raking Sail with malevolent eyes. Then he turned and climbed the companion steps.

Captain Cripp looked at Sail. He felt for the bottom step with one foot without looking down. As if he didn't expect it to do any good, he asked, "You wouldn't want to cooperate?"

"I wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"I've done it before."

Captain Cripp grinned slightly. "Just as you say. But if you get yourself in a sling, it'd be better if you had a reason for refusing to help the police."

"All I get out of this is 10 percent for recovering the stuff. I can't see a split. I need the dough."

"And you with a boat like this."

"Maybe I like boats and maybe it keeps me broke."

"The only reason you're not in the can right now is that any shyster could make this circumstantial evidence look funny as hell. Forget the split."

"Thanks," Sail said. "Now I'm going to sound off. It just might be that you lads think you can let me finish it out, then step in, and maybe find the location of that boat for yourselves. Then, while I was in your bastille, trying to explain things you could think to ask me, the stuff might disappear off the boat."

"That's kind of plain talk."

"I feel kind of plain right now."

Captain Cripp's ears moved up a little with the tightening of his jaw muscles. He took his foot off the companion step. He gave his cap an angry adjustment. Then he put the foot back again.

"This malaria is sure something. I feel like a lark today, only I keep thinking about the chills tomorrow."

"Try whiskey and quinine," Sail said.

"I think the whiskey part gave it to me."

The two cops went away with Joey kicking his feet down hard at the dock planks.

Sail took rye and aspirin for what ailed him, changed clothes, took a taxi uptown, and entered what looked like the largest hardware store. He asked where they kept their marine charts.

The nervous old salesman in the chart department had a rip in his canvas apron. He mixed his talk in with waving gestures of a pipe off which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most of the stem had been chewed.

"Mister, you must have some funny things happen to you, you being so tall," he said. "Right now, you look as if you had an accident."

Sail steadied himself by holding to the counter edge. "Who sells government charts here, Dad?"

"Well, there's one other store besides us. Hopkins Carter. But if you're going down in the Keys, we got everything you need here. If you go inside, you'll want charts thirty-two-sixty and sixty-one. They're the strip charts. But if you take Hawk Channel, you'll need harbor chart 583, and charts 1249, 50, and 51. Here, I'll show —"

Sail squinted his eyes, swallowed, and said, "I don't want to buy a chart. I want you to slip out and telephone me if either of a certain two persons comes in here and asks for chart 1250, the one which covers Lower Matecumbe."

"Huh?"

Sail said patiently, "It's easy, Dad. You just tell the party you got to get the chart, and go telephone me. Then stall around three or four minutes as if you were getting the chart out of the stock room. That will give me time to get over here and pick up their trail."

The nervous old man put his pipe in his mouth and immediately took it out again. "What kind of shenanygin is this?"

Sail showed him a license to operate in Florida.

"One of them fellers, huh?" The old man did not appear impressed.

Sail put a five-dollar bill on the counter. "That one's got a twin. How about it?"

The old man picked up the bill, squinted at it. "You mean I keep this whether they show up or not?"

"That's the idea."

"Go ahead, Mister, and describe them people."

Sail made a word picture of Blick and Nola. Not trusting Dad's memory, he put the salient points down on a piece of paper. He added a telephone number. "That phone is a booth in a cigar store on the next corner. How far is this Hopkins Carter store?"

"'Bout two blocks, reckon."

"I'll be there for the next ten minutes. Then I'll be in the cigar store. Ask for Chief Steward Johnson, when you call."

"That you?"

"Uh-huh."

Sail, walking off, was not as pale as he had been on the boat. He had put on a serge suit with more black than blue and a new black polo. He was taking a pull at a flat amber bottle when the old man yelled, "Mister!"

Sail lowered the bottle, started coughing.

"Lemme look at this again and see if you said anything about the way he talked," the old man said.

Sail moved back to where he could see the old fellow peering at the paper which held the descriptions. The old man took his pipe out of his teeth. "Mister, what does that feller talk like?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, about like the rest of these crackers. No, wait. He'll call you bud two or three times."

The old man waved his pipe. "I already sold that man a 1250."

"The devil you did!"

"Around half an hour ago."

"That's swell!" Sail pumped air out of his lungs in a short laugh which had no sound except such noise as the air made going past his teeth and out of his nostrils. "There was this one chance. They would probably want a late chart for their treasure hunting. And now they've got it, so they'll be off to the wars." He kissed a palm sneeringly. "That for the works!"

He weaved around, a lot more unsteady than he had been a minute before. He put the flat flask between his teeth and looked at the spinning ceiling fan. By the time he got his feet tracking in the general direction of the door, the old man was saying, "That there chart was delivered."

Sail maneuvered a turn and halt. "Eh?"

"He ordered it over the telephone, and we delivered. I got the address somewhere." The old man thumbed his order book, stopping to point at each name with his pipe stem.

"*Whileaway*," he said finally. "A houseboat on the Miami river below the Twelfth Street Causeway."

Sail put another $5 in front of the old man and headed outside. He was a lot steadier.

The houseboat *Whileaway* was built for rivers, and not very wide ones. Sixty feet or thereabouts waterline, she had three decks that put her up like a skyscraper. She was white, or had been. A man who loved boats would have said she should never have been built.

Scattered on shore nearby was a gravel pile, two trucks with nobody in them, a shed, junk from the hurricane, a trailer with both tires flat and windows broken, and two rowboats in as bad shape as the trailer.

Sail was behind most of the junk at one time or another on his way to the river bank. The river ran between wooden bulkheads at this point. Between Sail and *Whileaway*, two tugs, a yawl, a cruiser, and another houseboat were tied to dolphins along the bulkhead. Nobody seemed to be on any of the boats.

Sail stripped to dark-blue silk underwear shorts. He hid everything else under the junk. The water had a little more smell and floating things than in the harbor. After he had eased down into it, he kept behind the moored boats, next to the bulkhead. The tide carried him. He was just coming under the bow of *Whileaway* when one of the square window ports of the houseboat opened.

Sail sank suddenly. He thought somebody was going to shoot.

Something heavy — evidently it fell out of the porthole — hit the water. It sank quickly. Touching Sail, it pushed him aside. It went on sinking. Sail got the idea that a navy anchor was at the lowermost part of the sinking object.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He swam down after it. The river had only two fathoms here. He did not have much trouble finding it. When he clung to the object, the tide stretched his legs out behind.

Whoever had tied the knots was a sailor. Sailor knots, while they hold, are made to be easily untied. Sail got them loose. He began to think he wouldn't make the top with his burden. He was out of air.

His head came out of the water with eyes open, fixed in the direction of the square port. Nobody's head was there. No weapon appeared.

Sail looked around, then threw an arm up. He missed the first springline which held the houseboat to the bulkhead. He grasped the next one. He held Nola's head out of the water.

Some of the rope which had tied her to the heavy navy anchor was still wrapped around her. Sail used it to tie her to the springline, so that her head remained out of the water.

Then he had to try twice before he could get up the springline to the house-boat deck. Nola began gagging and coughing. It made a racket.

Sail stumbled through the handiest door. Waves of pain jumped from his ribs to his toes, from ribs to hair.

The houseboat furnishings must have been something fifteen years ago. Most of the varnish had alligatored. Sail got into the galley by accident. Rust, dirt, smell. He grabbed the only things in sight, a quart brass fire-extinguisher and an ice pick.

He found a dining salon beyond the galley. He was half across it when Andopolis came in the opposite door.

Andopolis had a rusty butcher knife in one hand. He was using the other hand to handle a chair for crutch, riding it with the knee of the leg which Blick and Nola had shot through.

Clustered around Andopolis's eyes — more on the lids than elsewhere — were puffy gray blisters. They were about the size burning cigarettes would make. Two fingernails were off one of his hands, the one which held the butcher knife. Red ran down over the rusty knife.

Sail threw the fire-extinguisher. He was weaker even than he had thought. The best he could do was bounce the extinguisher off the bulkhead.

Andopolis said thickly, "I feex you up this time, fran!" and reversed the knife for throwing.

Sail threw his ice pick. It was a good shot. The pick stuck into Andopolis's chest over his heart. But it did not go in deep enough to trouble Andopolis. He never bothered to jerk it out. He already had enough pain elsewhere.

Feet banged through the boat.

Andopolis threw. Sail dropped. The knife went over his head.

A uniformed cop had appeared in the door. Bad luck put him in the path of the knife. He made a bleating sound, took spraddling steps, and leaned against a bulkhead, his hands trying to cover the handle of the butcher knife and his left shoulder. He made a poor job of it.

Sail got up and lurched around Andopolis. The chair crutch made Andopolis clumsy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Once through the door behind Andopolis, Sail found himself in what had once been the main cabin. Blick sat on the cabin floor, his face a mess. His visage was smeared with blue ink. The ink bottle was upside down under a table on which a new marine chart was spread open. A common writing pen lay on the chart.

Andopolis came in after Sail, banging on the chair crutch. The ice pick still stuck in his chest by its point. He came at Sail, hopped on one leg, and swung his chair with the other.

Sail, coughing, hurting all over, tried to dodge. He made it, but fell down. Andopolis swung the chair. Sail rolled, and the chair went to pieces on the floor.

Nola was still screaming. Men were swearing outside. More men were running around on the houseboat, trying to find the way below.

Andopolis held a leg of his chair still. It was heavy. He hopped for Sail.

Sail, looking about wildly, saw the fire-extinguisher on the floor. It must have bounced in. He rolled to it.

Andopolis lifted the chair leg.

The extinguisher made *ink-sick!* noises as Sail pumped it. No tetrachloride came out. Nothing happened to indicate it ever would. Then a first squirt ran out about a foot. Sail aimed and pumped. The tetrachloride got into Andopolis's eyes.

Andopolis made snarling sounds and couldn't see any more.

Sail weaved to the table.

The chart on the table had two inked lines forming a V with arms that ran to landmarks on Lower Matecumbe island in the Florida keys. Compass bearings were printed beside each arm, and the point where the lines came together was ringed.

Several times, Sail's lips moved, repeating the bearings.

Then Sail picked up the pen. He made a NE into a NNE and a SSE out of an E.

His letters looked enough like the others so that nobody would guess the difference. And the lines of the V were wavy. They had not been laid out with a protractor — therefore they did not indicate an exact spot. Nobody would locate any sunken boat from that chart now.

Sail was repeating the true bearings to fix them in his memory when Andopolis came hopping in. Andopolis was still blind, but still had his chair leg.

Blick, on the floor, called, "Nola — kid — what's — wrong?" He didn't seem to know what was happening.

Andopolis weaved for Blick's mumbling voice.

"Blick!" Sail yelled. "Jump!"

Blick said foolishly, "Was that — you — Nola?"

Sail was stumbling towards him, fully aware he would not make it in time. He didn't. He woke up nights for quite a while hearing the sound that Andopolis's chair leg and Blick's head made.

Andopolis hopped around, still blind, trying to make for Sail. He had his chair leg raised. Hair, blood, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brains stuck to the hickory chair leg.

Andopolis stopped, stood perfectly still, and listened. Sail did not move. He was pale, swaying. He squatted, got his hands on the floor, sure he was going to fall if he didn't. He tried not to breathe loudly.

Captain Cripp, Patrolman Joey Cripp, and the old man from the hardware store came in together. The old man pointed at Sail and began, "There's the man who asked about the feller that got the chart. I told him the chart was delivered here, and he probably came right —"

Andopolis rushed the voice.

"Look out!" Sail croaked.

Andopolis instantly veered for where he thought Sail's voice had come from. He was a little wrong. It was hard for him to maintain a direction hopping on one leg. He hopped against a wall. Hard.

Andopolis sighed, leaned over backward, and hit the floor. It ended with Andopolis straightening out and relaxing. Hitting the wall had driven the ice pick deeper into his chest.

Sail remained on all fours on the floor. He felt, except for the pain, as if he were very drunk on bad liquor. He must have remained on his hands and knees a long time, for he was vaguely aware that Captain Cripp and Joey had walked around and around him, but without speaking. Then they found the chart.

"It's it," Joey said.

"Yeah." Captain Cripp sounded thoughtful. "What about it, Joey?"

"You're the boss, Pop."

Captain Cripp turned the corners of his mouth down. He folded the chart, stuck it inside his clothing, under his belt.

A doctor came in at last. He seemed to be a very silent doctor. He picked up Andopolis's wrist, held it a while, then put it back on the floor carefully. The wrist and arm were more flexible than that much rubber would have been. The doctor did not speak.

Sail was still on all fours. The doctor upset him gently. Sail had his tongue between his teeth. The doctor explored with his hands; when he came to Sail's chest, a small amount of sound escaped between Sail's teeth.

"My God!" the doctor said.

Four men helped with the stretcher as far as the ambulance, but only two when it came to getting the stretcher into the ambulance. Two could manage it better, using a system which they had. The ambulance started.

Captain Cripp got into the ambulance with Sail. He was holding his right hand to his nose.

"About Joey," he said. "I been wondering if Joey believed in something on the side, when he could get it. You know, kinda the modern idea."

He took his hand from his nose and quickly put a handkerchief in its place. The handkerchief got red.

Then he put the folded marine chart under Sail's head. "But Joey," he chuckled, "is as old-fashioned as angels — only he about busted my beak before I could explain."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE CASE OF THE ABANDONED TOWER

by AUSTIN RIPLEY

Professor Fordney found only dust and dried leaves on the creaky old steps of the winding stairway that led to the top of the abandoned observation tower. He pushed open the unbolted door to the balcony and stepped out. One hundred and fifty feet below, Sheriff Hamilton was kneeling beside the broken body of a man. Completing the circuit of the balcony, Fordney hurriedly descended, sniffing the musty air that permeated the tower.

"Just sheer luck that we found him in this isolated spot," Sheriff Hamilton remarked as the Professor joined him. "Few people come here at this time of year. He hasn't been here long . . . the ground under him is soaked."

From the appearance of the man's mud-covered shoes it was apparent that he had walked some distance. There was nothing in the pockets of his well-tailored clothes, which did not contain even a tailor's label or cleaners' marks.

"Your first job, Sheriff, will be to identify him," said Fordney, finishing his examination of the body. "You'll notice, by the way, that the back of his overcoat isn't very wet."

"So I see. Wonder how he knew about this old tower; he's a stranger in these parts. Well, he came to the right spot. It's the only thing around here high enough to jump from and be sure of doing a good job."

"You have drawn a natural inference, Sheriff, but he did not commit suicide," said Professor Fordney, again turning the body over on its face."

How did Professor Fordney know it was not suicide? You will find the solution at the bottom of the page, printed upside-down.

Since Fordney found *only* dust and dried leaves on the tower steps, he knew the dead man had not walked up them. Remember, the dead man's shoes were muddy; had the man walked up the steps, there would have been evidence of the mud.

Copyright by Press Alliance, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

THE MISSING HEIRESS *by BERNICE CAREY* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	". . . Bernice Carey . . . is making the realistic depiction of murder in the lower middle classes peculiarly her own." (AB)	"Author's talent for understatement acutely highlights social distinctions . . . Quite satisfactory." (AdV)
DEAD MAN'S PLANS *by MIGNON EBERHART* (RANDOM, $2.50)	". . . background . . . interesting . . . but the plotting is well below her best . . ." (AB)	"Atmosphere . . . is thick indeed, fairly out-Eberharting Eberhart. C plus." (LGO)
THE CORPSE THAT REFUSED TO STAY DEAD *by HAMPTON STONE* (SIMON & SCHUSTER, $2.50)	". . . sound detectival plot, peopled by believable characters, and neatly and surprisingly resolved." (AB)	". . . smart and entertaining work." (LGO)
OBIT DELAYED *by HELEN NIELSEN* (IVES WASHBURN, $2.50)	". . . high professional level . . . A taut and satisfactory job." (AB)	"Slower . . . less unusual than Miss Nielsen's first two novels, this is still fair and readable." (LGO)
THE MYSTERY OF MARIE LAFARGE *by EDITH SAUNDERS* (MORROW, $2.50)	"A fascinating true story, told with understanding and taste. Recommended." (FC)	"Adroit retelling of a French *Cause célèbre* . . . Curious." (AdV)
DEATH OF NO LADY *by SELDON TRUSS* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	" . . . the contrapuntal plot-structure would have delighted Wilkie Collins." (AB)	". . . light and brittle, quite amusing throughout . . . Painless." (AdV)
RING AND WALK IN *by MIRIAM BORGENICHT* (HARPER, $2.50)	". . . villain finally becomes all but incredible . . . But . . . strong and moving . . ." (AB)	"A literate and extremely perceptive story . . . Hair-raising." (AdV)
THE PASSIONATE VICTIMS *by LANGE LEWIS* (BOBBS-MERRILL, $2.50)	". . . the second half of the book is as exasperating as the first was promising." (AB)	"Realistic subtle story, well if wordily written, but lacking in emotional impact." (AdV)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

"... wind-up ... very well handled. The best story this reader has read by Miss Carey." (FC)	"Ingenious plot, soundly handled; characterization excellent; treatment assured, intelligent." (SC)	
"... usual skill ... pretty effective considering how foolish it all is." (JS)	"Mrs. Eberhart's special brew of riches, elegance, and a damsel in distress has never been better." (FC)	
"... character sketching shrewd; atmosphere nostalgic, and mystery entertainment unsurpassed." (DBH)	"... sleuth works with enjoyable finesse in clever mixup of egotistical young crackpots." (DD)	
"This is a well wound tale, well paced and set down with useful acerbities ..." (JS)	"... story has some motion, but nowhere exceeds speed limit. So-so." (SC)	
"... well researched and written ..." (DBH)	"Puzzle ... fails to wear well; treatment lacks zip; honest workmanship." (SC)	
"... intermittently amusing and ultimately pretty tiresome ..." (JS)	"Ramifications ... abundance of characters combine to confuse reader." (SC)	
"... villain may seem overdrawn ... but while you're reading the suspense is terrific." (LGO)	"Extraordinary characterization of a suave fiend in a movingly human ... story ..." (DD)	
"... has a genuine interest ... Effortful but still within the bounds of readability." (JS)	"... panorama pretty broad ... but writing and handling are mature. Worthwhile." (SC)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Los Angeles Daily News*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

JS: *James Sandoe in the New York Herald Tribune*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Barbara Vetterlein's "Dear Departed Harold" is one of the seven "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. It is an enjoyable, light-hearted tale, with a fillip in the prose and a flick at the close. The author lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, was thirty when she wrote the story for last year's contest, is married, has a daughter not quite three years old, and describes herself as being "in the 'Housewife' category." Before her marriage in 1949 to Bill Vetterlein, she sold a few free-lance radio scripts to WGN in Chicago; in 1947 she sought a career in California, writing lyrics for a number of songs with Bob Ecton, the Hollywood pianist. But, as Mrs. Vetterlein expressed it, "the world has yet to discover our genius." She left California, "tanned, disappointed, and slightly undernourished." Neither her subsequent marriage nor the arrival of small Babs has dulled her appetite for reading mystery stories — or attempting to write them. We sincerely hope that Barbara Vetterlein's debut in print acts as a sort of criminological catalyst, and that she redoubles her efforts to write in the blithe-spirited style of her first-published story.

DEAR DEPARTED HAROLD

by BARBARA VETTERLEIN

THE USUAL SATURDAY AFTERNOON foursomes were finishing up in the men's locker room of Philadelphia's Old Meadows Country Club. Nobody was fully dressed; nobody resembled an underwear ad. Male pulchritude was low, but spirits high.

Ed Harkness had just finished the story about the old man and the car salesman. Loud laughter rang through the steamy smoke-filled room.

Joe Williams, a tall thin man clutching a highball, bowed his head in mock dignity. He raised his glass.

"And on that somber note, gentlemen, may I close this quiet gathering with a toast?"

"A toast!" a bourbony baritone echoed.

"To what?" somebody asked.

Williams rattled the ice in his glass.

"To . . . uh. Lessee. To . . . I've got it! To dear departed Harold Peters. May his wings be extra big and shiny in the high blue yonder!"

"Amen, brother!" loudly cried his audience.

"These old walls won't seem the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same without Harold's curses bouncing off them!" another added.

"Amen! Amen!" Voices yelled. Glasses clinked.

A tanned young man draped in a towel sat watching, apart from the main group. He turned to a rather heavy-set man of some 40 summers who had just finished with his tie and was starting to put a tennis racket in its press.

"As an out-of-towner from St. Louis, I didn't know Harold . . . but if you'll join me in a drink . . ."

The older man looked up, eyeing him thoughtfully.

"I thought everyone knew Harold Peters."

"Not I," grinned the stranger. "My company just moved me here. And that offer still holds. I never drink alone if I can help it. Dick Saunders is my name, sir."

His companion put down the racket, extended a hand.

"Bob O'Connor. Glad to know you, Dick. I'll take you up on that drink. Scotch on the rocks."

Dick gave the locker boy the order, then looked over at the little group now going full blast on the *Whiffenpoof Song.*

"Harold's loss must've meant something to those boys!"

O'Connor snorted. "Harold's going is cause for great celebration, believe me."

Noting the frank surprise on Dick Saunders' face, he added, "Don't get me wrong. I'm loaded with brotherly love . . . up to a certain point. But Peters. . . . Well, you've asked for it. Let me have a light for this cigarette, and I'll give you the story on that guy."

Harold Peters was a big man. Big in build, income, and ego. From assorted family branches he had inherited a sizable amount of stocks and bonds, and had bought into a few Texas gushers besides.

Living under such circumstances was all Grade A. Harold was handsome in a florid, noisy way that mowed down many feminine hearts, bulldozer fashion. He tried, successfully, to be the country's most colorful bachelor east of Howard Hughes. Never very lovable, or even likable, he bought or fought his way into all the best places. Possibly his greatest achievement was endorsing filtered cigarettes, a shaving lotion, and sitting for a whiskey advertisement. Each ad tactfully referred to him as a renowned amateur sportsman of discerning taste.

Gossip columnists and their female followers knew that sooner or later some glamorous deb or model would capture him. But Harold kept saying marriage was a yoke, son, and words to that effect.

It wasn't until he reached 40 that he succumbed to holy wedlock.

Marilee Lewis was no deb or model. She ran a little bookstore in Ardmore and supported a widowed mother.

Her features and figure, while nicely assembled, could never be classified as cover-girl material. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

openly admitted to being 29 in circles where you usually don't tell after twenty-one.

Harold, who seldom opened a book of any sort, wandered into her shop to purchase *War and Peace*. He figured his yacht should have something intellectual on its built-in bookshelf.

After laughingly explaining this to Miss Lewis, he was quite startled to note she neither simpered coyly nor quivered eagerly.

She merely questioned, "Wouldn't a collection of Peter Arno's cartoons do just as well? After all, who reads on a yacht?"

With that, she calmly shoved a volume under his Roman nose.

As Harold stood there, gazing open-mouthed into her wide blue eyes, Miss Lewis blandly added, "Besides, these are marked down, and I would like to get rid of them."

This quiet episode marked the beginning of the Lewis-Peters idyll. Harold could neither eat nor sleep. This Lewis girl was different. Marilee was literally swept off her feet by a tweedy, ardent dynamo.

Six months later, with some sideline prompting from her mother who loved the finer things in life, Marilee became Mrs. Harold Peters.

Marilee did her best to live up to the flamboyant, worldly Peters tradition. She pored over etiquette books, cook books, *Vogue* and *Fortune*. Such reading matter taught her to deal with servants, cocktail parties, and dinner partners, from tycoons to Ty Power.

Harold's Main Line acquaintances liked Marilee and had great hopes for the new domesticated Harold. Settling with his bride in their beautiful home with sweeping lawns and a large second-floor nursery, he was bound to mellow like fine old wine.

The loud, heavy-drinking braggart they used to mutter about was replaced by an affable soul who had even been seen smiling at their children.

People were glad to note that Marilee took up golf, her husband's particular Sunday god. Many an hour she practised out at the club after her daily lesson — practised until she was stiff and sore and her soft hands were blistered. Nothing was too painful to endure — if it would please Harold.

Unfortunately, as months passed and Marilee struggled in the tee zone, Harold gradually slipped back into his old ways. Sweetness and light were beginning to pall. Hot meals on time and suburban companions with sticky kiddies and smoky outdoor grills became a bore.

The very fact that Marilee was sweet, devoted, and uncomplicated grated on him. He nagged, and she wouldn't fight back. He cursed and swore, and she merely looked baffled and teary-eyed.

Nothing his wife did suited him — especially, her golf game.

Every time they played, he loudly criticized her swing, sneered at her drives, snarled at her iron shots. Tirelessly he ridiculed her before caddies and couples playing with them. Soon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it was difficult to find willing caddies or partners.

Marilee lost interest — first, in the game, and then, in Harold Peters.

The turning point came the night he grabbed a nine-iron and broke her beloved collection of antique milk glass.

Marilee called him the only bad name she knew, packed up a few pre-Harold possessions, and went back to her mother.

Marilee's departure had a strange effect on her husband. Whether it was his conscience or a bourbon reaction, something drove Harold to her mother's apartment, pleading for one more chance.

As he sat blubbering on the sofa, a strange look came into Marilee's honest blue eyes. A pensive, scheming look that Harold, busy gesticulating, missed. She murmured she would play golf with him the next day.

This announcement came as a surprise. Golf had not entered the conversation. Marilee explained that if they could play just one peaceful round, perhaps they could settle other differences too.

Harold quickly reminded her that the next day would be the annual caddies' picnic. Marilee laughed and said something about pulling a cart before the course.

Harold mopped his brow; said he'd pick her up at ten.

She told him to make it earlier. Eight thirty, in fact. Sharp.

Harold heard himself agree. Then he returned to his lofty, lonely house and dazedly poured down a number of large nightcaps.

Since very few members cared to play without a caddy, and fewer still were able to start golf at 8:45 on weekday mornings, the course was deserted when the Peterses teed off.

Bill Jenkins, the club pro, watched them from the golf shop window. He muttered, "Now I've seen everything!" and went back to his copy of *The Corpse Wore Plus-Fours.*

As usual, Harold made the first hole in par, with a four. Marilee, as usual, landed in a trap. He said nothing when she finally reached the green in a cloud of dirt and three-putted to score a nine. Obviously, he was trying to be nice.

On the second hole, Harold's drive was powerful. Too much so. The ball flew off into the woods on the right. This did not help his early morning humor, at best a weak and unreliable thing.

After his wife drove her ball more than 100 yards right down the fairway, he told her what she had done wrong. He then told her what she would probably do wrong next.

Marilee took Harold's sour remarks in good humor. Nothing rattled her this cool Fall morning.

Harold did better on the third hole, but the memory of his five on the par-three second hole still rankled. He suggested that in the future Marilee play on a public course until she acquired more respect for the tender, costly turf of Old Meadows.

On the fourth hole Harold was dis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gusted with his drive, and thought even less of his wife's. As she pulled her cart off towards a clump of pines, he told her precisely what he thought of her for ignoring his golfing advice.

His helpmate walked on, her face a mask of calm determination, her cheeks very pink. She reached the pine trees, then stopped to grope in the large pocket of her golf bag.

"For Pete's sake, Mari, go hunt for the ball!" Harold bellowed.

"This one will do, dear."

With that terse announcement, Mrs. Harold Peters hastily pulled out a large slingshot, took careful aim, and shot a golf ball into the air.

Her target, shocked and immobile, could only squeal, "Mari!"

A split-second later the swift and sure little ball bounced off his sunburned forehead. He sank, Goliath-like, on the soft green turf.

Marilee paused only to shove the murder weapon down the front of her roomy sport shirt and to make sure no pulse throbbed in Harold's thick wrist.

She ran all the way back to the golf shop. In between genuine tears, sobs, and gasps, she told Bill Jenkins of the fatal accident.

Jenkins, ever resourceful, patted her hand, called an ambulance, and left hurriedly for the fourth fairway.

Marilee, her legs wobbly, her heart pounding oddly, collapsed on the nearest bench. Her scheme had worked. The perfect murder had been committed.

Everything was going as planned. Except one thing. She hadn't counted on this terrible feeling of guilt.

The Peters's family lawyer found her there as he walked in to leave a damaged brassie with Jenkins.

His emotions upon viewing this pale, tear-streaked creature were varied. As family lawyer, he knew he should ask what was wrong, then express fatherly concern. As a male and as a secret admirer of blue-eyed Mrs. Peters, he longed to sweep her into his arms.

He had no choice.

Seeing this familiar, kindly face, Marilee burst into fresh tears and clutched wildly at him. He gathered her in his large, capable arms, kissed her tenderly. Whispering, "There, there, darling," he led her off to the water cooler inside the ladies' lounge.

It might have been the effect of the pure water. It might have been the sympathetic, freshly-shaved face before her. Marilee suddenly found herself telling all: her childhood and her tomboy skill with a slingshot; her marriage and her growing hatred of Harold Peters; her craving for revenge and the perfect opportunity presented by the Caddy Picnic Day.

As the sad story unfolded, the family lawyer felt his attention wandering. Details of Harold Peters's death seemed insignificant. Details of his widow's beautiful tear-filled eyes, were much more interesting.

After she used the word murderess for the third time, the trusted lawyer threw legal caution to the winds. Kindly but firmly he told her to shut

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up, kissed her, and began talking.

So far as he was concerned, her husband's death was still a tragic accident. She was a grieving widow. The slingshot did not exist. To make sure of that, she was to bury it under the luxuriant compost heap back of her garden. Later, after a respectable period of mourning, he would help her forget a lot of things.

Then, before she could protest further, he drove her home. Authoritatively, he ordered her to bed.

This done, the lawyer returned to the club to make sure the bothersome details of his client's demise went smoothly.

They worked out far better than his wildest hopes.

A year later Mrs. Peters was his bride. They both gave up golf. Gardening was much more relaxing. . . .

The crowd in the locker room was thinning out. Bob O'Connor rose hastily. "Lord, look at the time! I must get going!"

Young Saunders, still deep in the Peters story, protested.

"But you can't leave now! I haven't heard how the murder was discovered. . . ."

O'Connor moved on towards the door. He paused long enough to look back with a cryptic smile.

"Who said it was?"

He was gone. Dick Saunders, towel clad, was powerless to pursue him. Desperately, he turned to an older man closing a suitcase.

"That man . . . that man who was talking to me just now. Who is he?"

"Who? Oh, you mean O'Connor."

Saunders tried not to shout, but he managed to blurt, "Was . . . was he Harold Peters's lawyer?"

The older man smiled. "Was is right."

"And . . . and Marilee Peters. Is she Bob O'Connor's wife now?"

"Natch." The man picked up his suitcase.

Dick Saunders clutched at him.

"Wait! About Peters's death . . ."

The man gave him an odd look. "Peters dead? Since when?"

"The golf ball that hit him . . . his wife's ball. I mean . . ."

"Look here, young fellow, you're a pretty confused guy. Peters was conked a while back, but it was strictly an accident. I can't remember whose ball it was. Anyway, it sure didn't kill him. Seemed to knock some sense into him, I'd say. Made him quiet down."

"But . . . but you all were talking about his wings. . . ."

"Sure. As I said, he toned down. Got a divorce. Said Marilee was too good for him and decided to serve his country. Pulled some wires and got into the Air Force. Received his wings just the other day. It was in all the papers. Say, where are you from, anyway?"

"I . . ."

"Well, I guess it doesn't really matter. I've got to beat it — but you'd better sober up, young man. Some of those ideas of yours . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CAT-AND-MOUSE

by JULIAN SYMONS

"EITHER MY HUSBAND'S MAD." THE fair-haired woman said, "or somebody's trying to kill him."

Francis Quarles stared at her from the other side of his big desk. His face was as puffy as a frog's, but the black eyes above his great cheeks were watchful. "If your doctor inclines towards the first supposition," he said, "I think your husband should consult an alienist without delay. If towards the second, you would do well to inform Scotland Yard. Perhaps you have already done so."

"No. I came to you instead." She looked at the window overlooking Leicester Square that said in reverse *Francis Quarles, Investigator.*

"Why?"

"The police would only laugh at me. I thought you wouldn't. I —" She looked down at a crocodile handbag.

"My dear Mrs. Prothero, I can assure you that I find little to laugh at either in madness or murder. May I suggest that it would be a good thing if your husband came here and told his own story?"

"He won't come out. He's afraid to leave the house. He wants me to bring you back to see him."

"Afraid of what?"

"A man named Jerry O'Brien. He says Jerry O'Brien's trying to kill him."

"Go on," Quarles said. His eyes, black and unwinking, stared at her while she told her story. She was an expensively-dressed woman in her early 40's with a round, sagging, discontented face. While she talked she played with the clasp of her crocodile handbag.

Her name was Rita Prothero, and she was the wife of a man named Charles Prothero. "A company promoter," she said vaguely. She had married Prothero five years ago, soon after she had met him, and she knew nothing of his earlier life except that he had lived for some years in Australia. Nor did she know much of his business here. "Company promoters always make money, don't they?" It was her second marriage and his first. The name of her first husband had been Johnny James. "He was no good," Mrs. Prothero said, but her voice was tender. "I was a girl then, and I don't mind telling you I was mad about him, but he was no good. He left me high and dry — just left me like that, after eighteen months."

"Incredible," said Quarles politely.

"It hurt, I don't mind telling you. But he was a crook, he did a stretch over here. When he came out he skipped off to South America. I thought I should never get over it. But I got a divorce. Then I met Charlie. He's always been good to me. Until . . ."

Until one day at breakfast three

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weeks ago her husband had opened a letter and cried out sharply. He would not tell her what was wrong, but a week later another letter came, and he showed it to her. The letter was typewritten and contained vague threats and references to the past. He had destroyed both letters, but she remembered a few phrases: *Bolts and bars are no defenses. Look over your shoulder in an empty street and you will see the shadow. I shall not rest till you are dead.* At the bottom of the letter was the name *Jerry O'Brien*, in a straggling, uneducated hand.

There could be no doubt that her husband took the letters seriously. He told her that if anything happened to him she would be comfortably provided for. But who was Jerry O'Brien? "Somebody who held a grudge against me from the old days." He would tell her no more. And what did he look like? Fifteen years ago, Prothero said, O'Brien was so tall and thin that he used to be known as "The Shadow." The use of that phrase had convinced Prothero that the letter was not a practical joke.

Since then two attempts had been made on Prothero's life.

"Two?" Quarles looked surprised. "Rather inefficient, Mr. O'Brien."

"I think he's playing cat-and-mouse. Charlie hasn't been outside the door for three days. He made me get rid of the woman who worked for us, because he was afraid O'Brien might bribe her." Rita Prothero clicked her bag decisively shut. "Oh, Mr. Quarles, will you come to him?"

During the latter part of her story Quarles had been standing with his back to her, looking out of the window at the crowds below in Leicester Square. Standing, he was revealed as a man of great weight and size, dandyishly dressed, remarkably light on his feet as he moved over to the desk, took a revolver from a drawer, and slipped it into his pocket. "If Mr. O'Brien should arrive while I am talking to your husband, we must be in a position to receive him suitably."

Rita Prothero called out as they came out of a small square hall into the sitting-room, "Charlie, Charlie, are you there?" The anxiety in her voice was not feigned. From an inner room a reedy voice answered, "Here, darling."

"Bathroom," Mrs. Prothero indicated as they went through the vulgarly modern sitting-room with its matching television and radio sets and jaggedly patterned black-and-orange carpet. "Sitting-room, bedroom. It's a small flat." There were twin beds in the bedroom, and in one of them a man lay backed by pillows. An electric fire was on, and the room was warm, but the pajama-jacketed man in bed was shivering. On a bedside table an assortment of objects lay in disarray — newspapers, magazines, bottles of aspirin, liver pills, hair tonic, and a glass of water. The man looked at the watch on his wrist and said petulantly, "You've been a long time."

"Darling." Rita Prothero was some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how tenderer than Quarles would have expected. "Nothing happened?"

"The telephone. And the front-door bell rang."

"You didn't answer it?"

"Of course I didn't. Do you take me for a fool?" The hand with which he lifted the glass of water was shaking. "You're Mr. Quarles. Sit down, sit down." The man sat upright and his pajama shirt fell open. He was a thin man with thin fair hair and spots of red on his cheekbones. There could be no doubt that he was nervous. Beads of sweat formed on his upper lip, which he constantly licked away. He said in that high reedy voice, "You're going to help hang this murdering devil O'Brien after he's killed me."

"You're sure he'll kill you?"

Prothero nodded. There was something hypnotic about the intensity of his nervous gaze. "He's tried twice."

"How?"

"Ten days ago I was coming home on the Tube in the rush hour. We were jammed tightly on the platform waiting for the train — you know how it is. And I found myself slowly moving to the edge of the platform. I was in the middle of a crowd twelve deep — in the *middle* of it, Mr. Quarles. There were six people between me and the edge. And then somehow there were five. And then four, three, two, one. And then I was on the edge of the platform. How did it happen?"

"Well," Quarles said, "how *did* it happen?"

"Somebody was pushing me forward — but invisibly, Mr. Quarles; invisibly, do you understand that? I moved forward and forward and I could see no cause for it. I tried to turn round and then I felt myself falling. I couldn't have saved myself. But somebody caught my arm and pulled me back."

"And you didn't see O'Brien?"

"No, I didn't see O'Brien — *not that time.* But I did see him the next time. Bring my hat, Rita." Mrs. Prothero went out of the room and returned with a gray trilby hat. Through the top of the hat, at the same distance from the top on both sides, a neat hole was punctured. Quarles turned the hat over and over in his hands. A metal tag on the inside bore the initials *C. P.* "I was down at Carmont races in Hampshire last week and it happened that the place where I was standing was on a small knoll outlined against the sky. Somehow I couldn't fix my attention on the race. I kept looking down at the crowd a long way below me, and there on the rails my eye suddenly caught something bright." With extraordinary earnestness Prothero said, "Standing in that crowd was Jerry O'Brien and he had a gun in his hand. He was 60 yards away, but I'd recognize him anywhere."

"You could be sure of him? You've not seen him for years?"

"If you saw a scarecrow six and a half feet tall with a great shock of black hair, wouldn't you be sure? And if I needed any convincing —" Proth-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ero pointed to the hat, "I suddenly felt my hat blow off, and when I picked it up —" He pointed to the holes.

Quarles dropped the hat. "Why does O'Brien want to kill you?"

Prothero's thin lips were firmly pressed together. "That has nothing to do with it."

"Very well." Quarles heaved his great bulk off the chair with a sigh. "I regret that I can do nothing for you."

Rita Prothero put her hand to her mouth. "But the two murder attempts?"

Quarles waved his hand. "A murderer who has twice been so deplorably inefficient is unlikely to succeed on a third occasion. My own view, Mr. Prothero, is that you can sleep soundly in bed tonight without fear. Since that is purely an expression of opinion, I do not propose to make a charge for it."

And Quarles let himself out.

At half-past eleven that night he put down a treatise on *The Metaphysics of Self-Destruction* and picked up the telephone, which was ringing. The gritty voice of Inspector Leeds said, "Quarles? Did you see a man called Prothero this afternoon?"

"Yes. He said his life was being threatened. Some sort of practical joke."

"It was practical enough," the Inspector said grimly. "Prothero's dead."

The facts, as Inspector Leeds outlined them to a remarkably silent Quarles, were these. After the detective's visit, Prothero, according to his wife, had become more cheerful and even inclined to laugh at his own fears. He suggested that his wife should go to the movies, and was so insistent that finally she rang up a friend named Mrs. Esdaile and they went to see *Command Division.*

The two women returned to the flat together. Mrs. Prothero called her husband's name, but he was not in the bedroom. They found his body on the floor of the bathroom, battered to death. The instrument of murder, a coal axe, lay by the body, clean of prints. The murderer had struck again and again, with such fury that he had smashed the face to a pulp. There was one remarkable point: Prothero, who had been in bed wearing pajamas when his wife left him, was fully dressed and apparently ready to go out.

"Identify him?" the Inspector asked as they stood looking down at the bloody head with the ludicrously respectable gray suit and polished shoes beneath it. "I thought not. Neither can his wife. Same size and coloring, that's all anyone can say. Motive wasn't robbery. Over £100 in his wallet."

"When was he killed?"

"Some time during the last ten hours." The Inspector grunted. "As if I couldn't have told the doctor that. His wife was with him for three-quarters of an hour after you left at five o'clock, so it was after that. What did you think of him?"

Quarles recounted his interview

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as he looked at the things taken from the dead man's clothes and body. A wallet contained money, a few business letters, some pieces of string, half of a railway ticket to Manchester, Prothero's identity card. By its side lay silver and copper from Prothero's trouser pockets, a thin gold half-hunter watch from his waistcoat, keys on a chain, shirt studs, onyx links, armlets.

"Everything here?" Quarles asked.

"Every single thing in his clothing or on his body." Quarles went into the bedroom and looked at the bed, with Prothero's pajamas flung carelessly on it, and then at the bedside table with its aspirin, liver pills, and water untouched. He looked over the rest of the room, on top of the dressing-table and a chest of drawers, as though searching for something. He looked in the bathroom, where the gruesome thing on the floor had been covered with a cloth. When he returned to the sitting-room his black eyes were glinting oddly.

"Any ideas?" Inspector Leeds asked, and did not wait for an answer. "What about this — that body isn't Prothero at all but O'Brien?" Quarles blew out his heavy cheeks and let them down. The effect was like letting air out of a balloon. "Can't explain the body being dressed otherwise. Here's the way it happened. While Mrs. P. was out at the pictures this O'Brien rang up. Probably those 'murder attempts' were done to throw a scare into Prothero, perhaps with a view to blackmail. But Prothero didn't scare. He asked O'Brien round, hit him on the head and killed him. Then he dressed O'Brien in his own clothes, beat him up so that he should be unrecognizable, packed the blood-stained clothes in a suitcase and — vanished into thin air. How about that?"

Quarles said in a gentle voice, "Prothero said O'Brien was very tall and thin with a shock of black hair. The body is of medium height, with thin fair hair."

The Inspector was not much dashed. "We've only got Prothero's word for what O'Brien looked like. Still, I've got the doctor and dentist coming round. We'll see what they say. Any suggestions?"

"Find out the state of Prothero's bank balance. Check back on him in Australia and see what you can discover about O'Brien."

On the following afternoon the Inspector telephoned Quarles. He sounded depressed. "I was being too clever. That body was Prothero's, all right. Dentist identified it by the fillings in the teeth, doctor recognized old appendicitis scar. No doubt whatever it's Prothero. That means O'Brien's the murderer. Must have been a maniac to smash the head like that."

"What news of O'Brien?"

The Inspector chuckled. "Friend Prothero was a man of parts. He floated companies in Australia, too, in the dim past. Jumped his bail over there on a charge of fraud, left his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

partner Jerry O'Brien holding the bag. O'Brien got seven years, swore in the dock that he'd get Prothero when he came out. That was five years ago, when he was let out, and no trace of him over there in the past three years. Prothero was canny when he came here — wouldn't have his photograph taken. Mrs. P. hasn't got a single snap of him, though that doesn't matter, as identification is so positive. But he wasn't quite canny enough. O'Brien caught up with him in the end. And we'll catch up with O'Brien. The drag's out for him now. You're not saying anything," the Inspector said accusingly.

"How was Prothero fixed financially?"

"Very comfortable. Thirty thousand in the bank which goes to Mrs. P. in his will. He'd kept just inside the law in his operations over here, as far as I can gather."

"Look here," Quarles said. "There's something I'd like to come down and check up." He told the Inspector what he wanted, and an hour later he was at Scotland Yard turning over the photograph and record file. He stopped before one photograph. "Yes," he said, and sighed.

"Who the devil's that?"

"The murderer."

Rita Prothero had been distressed, but not hysterical, when she found her husband's body, and for a week she behaved in a discreetly grief-stricken manner. She went to stay with her friend Mrs. Esdaile, and the two women sometimes went out together to do a little shopping or visit mutual acquaintances. But on the eighth day after her husband's death Mrs. Prothero went out alone. Her progress was curious. She visited Selfridge's, where she went up in an elevator and down by the stairs; Bourne & Hollingsworth's, where she entered by one door, walked quickly through the shop, and went out by another door; and Liberty's, where she stood in one corner of the carpet department for several minutes. When she left Liberty's a taxi took her to the Harrow Road. There Mrs. Prothero paid off the taxi and hurried down a dirty side street. She had opened the door of a tenement house with a key from her pocket when she was surprised to find two men beside her. One was Inspector Leeds and the other was Quarles. Behind them were two constables. She opened her mouth to scream, but a hand was placed over it.

The slattern who kept the house told the two men what they wanted to know, and they opened without ceremony a door on the first floor. Inside a man playing solitaire said "Rita," and then turned to face them.

He was the thin man with fair hair who had been introduced to Quarles as Prothero.

"Inspector, allow me to present," Quarles said, "the murderer of Charles Prothero — Mr. Johnny James."

"A nice little plot." Quarles sat with his feet on his desk, eating Elvas plums. "She'd always been mad about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Johnny James, as she was incautious enough to admit to me. When he came back to this country he must have bowled her off her feet again. But James had no money, and Prothero was well fixed. They might have been able to blackmail him, but it happened that James and Prothero were more or less of a size and the fact that Prothero never let himself be photographed put the idea of a clever murder into James's head. If they simply killed Prothero — just like that — with no motive, investigation would soon reveal their little affair. But supposing Prothero had been in fear of his life because of a mysterious enemy — that would divert suspicion very satisfactorily. And Mrs. Prothero, of course, knew all about O'Brien and Prothero's past. So they staged their little act on me. They'd already killed Prothero when she came to see me — his body must have been in the bathroom while James was telling me his story. No wonder they were nervous."

"Don't see what put you on to it," the Inspector said in an injured tone.

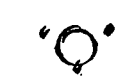
"James made three mistakes. The second one was in those fantastic stories he told me about O'Brien's attempts to kill him. He said that O'Brien shot at him, and he produced his punctured hat as proof. But his story was that he had been on a small knoll outlined against the sky looking down on the crowd. There he saw O'Brien who shot at him. So O'Brien shot upwards, and that meant any hole in Prothero's hat must have entered through the side and passed upwards through the crown. But the hat he showed me had a hole neatly punctured through both sides, at the same distance from the top of the hat. In other words, the shot that punctured it had been fired on the level, not at an upward angle. Therefore, James lied.

"The third point was the wrist-watch. When I saw the man who was supposed to be Prothero he was wearing a wrist-watch. The body had a gold half-hunter in the waistcoat pocket — and no wrist-watch. It was improbable that Prothero would wear *two* watches at the same time — but where, in any case, had the wrist-watch gone? It wasn't in the bedroom nor in the bathroom. And the obvious answer was that it hadn't belonged to Prothero at all, but to somebody else. Who was the somebody else? It seemed a fair bet that it might be the man Mrs. Prothero spoke of with such tenderness — Johnny James. And your photograph file confirmed it."

Quarles took another Elvas plum from the box and looked at it speculatively. "But of course," he added, "James's most serious mistake was the initial one."

"What was that?" the Inspector asked innocently.

"My dear Inspector! Trying to pass off that preposterous masquerade on *me*."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NO STURM AND NO DRANG

Comparatively few detective-story writers have performed the 'tec hat trick — that is, have had their detectives appear in all five of the most important media. Earl Derr Biggers did it: his Charlie Chan, that "patient, aphoristic Chinese-Hawaiian-American" sleuth, has been the protagonist of six excellent novels, all of which were originally serials in "The Saturday Evening Post"; and from these six stories, by the miracle of Hollywood, have come at least forty motion pictures, starring Warner Oland and Sidney Toler; in addition, from the same seemingly inexhaustible half-dozen tales, Charlie Chan became a weekly crime-buster on the air waves, and more recently, through the revival of the old movies, a TV favorite with addicts of the "late shows" and the "late, late shows." Yes, through books, magazines, motion pictures, radio, and television, the name of Chan has achieved the high estate of now being a "household word."

Yet it is interesting to note that Charlie Chan's success was not an immediate phenomenon, either in a critical or popular sense. He was not, for example, the instantaneous sensation of S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance, even though Charlie actually appeared on the scene a full year ahead of Philo. The dust jacket of the first Charlie Chan book, THE HOUSE WITHOUT A KEY *(1925), did not even mention Mr. Biggers's now celebrated detective by name — it merely referred to "the fat Chinese detective." But after a few SEP serials and bestselling books, Charlie's publishers commenced to glow, and dust-jacket blurbs began to speak of Charlie Chan by name, and described him, most properly, as "so delightful, so humorous, so wise, so shrewd." Nevertheless, it is a fact that so comprehensive a history of the detective story as H. Douglas Thomson's* MASTERS OF MYSTERY *(1931) failed to mention either Mr. Biggers or Charlie Chan.*

How did Mr. Biggers come to think of a Confucius-minded little Oriental as a new kind of detective? The author himself has explained. "Sinister and wicked Chinese are old stuff," Mr. Biggers once wrote, "but an amiable Chinese on the side of law and order had never been used." So Mr. Biggers took the popular conception of a "Dr. Fu-Manchu" and reversed it — gave the inscrutable face a smile, changed the fiend and fanatic into a friendly ferret, turned the ruthless villain into a gentle, kindly philosopher, transformed the tall, lean, feline evil genius into a short, pudgy, lovable good samaritan — and thus performed a service to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

humanity and to inter-racial relations for which the world has not yet given Mr. Biggers one-tenth the credit he deserved . . .

Ever since EQMM was born, more than ten years ago, we have hoped to bring you an adventure of Charlie Chan. But like certain other famous fictional detectives — Van Dine's Philo Vance, Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason, Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe, the Lockridges's Mr. and Mrs. North — Charlie Chan has never appeared in short-story form. We remember corresponding with Mr. Biggers, back in the old "Mystery League" days, asking him — indeed, pleading with him — to write at least one Chan short story for posterity. But Mr. Biggers replied that if he could hit upon a really satisfactory short-story idea for Chan, he would not squander it on 6000-to-7000 words; he would expand the idea to a 60,000-to-70,000 word novel. It was an argument we could never overcome.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Biggers wrote comparatively few short stories — a dozen or so, at the most. Only one of them dealt with crime, and it took the most intensive searching to track this one down, since it has never been reprinted or included in any of Mr. Biggers's published books. But you will find in it all the qualities which made the Charlie Chan stories so genuinely popular: the quiet humor; the skilled craftsmanship; the sheer professional entertainment of a simple and unpretentious style — the very qualities of writing and technique which, as Mrs. Biggers herself so perceptively called to our attention, symbolize "quite another era than the present one of Sturm and Drang." Indeed, when you read this one and only crime short story written by the creator of Charlie Chan, you may be reminded of Charlie's own words — which serve as the perfect introduction: "May the seven watchful gods continue to encourage your feet along the path of happiness" — including, but not limited to, reading happiness.

THE EBONY STICK

by EARL DERR BIGGERS

AT NINE O'CLOCK ON A BRIGHT JUNE morning, Clay Garrett, colored, intermittent sweeper and duster of the leading bank in a large Texas city, opened the heavy doors that led from the street into that most marble of bank interiors. Two minutes later — this being also part of the regular

Copyright, 1916, by Eleanor Biggers Cole; renewed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

schedule — Major Tellfair, white-haired but erect, crossed the threshold, nodded to Clay and to the boys behind the bars, and passed into the office where he ruled as president. There he opened his desk, lighted a cigar, and began the perusal of his morning paper.

He had got no farther than the headlines of the first page when the door of his office opened and young Dick Merrill of the Silver Star Ranch came in. Merrill was covered with the dust he had collected on his ride in from the ranch that morning. Lighting his face was the Merrill smile, human and kindly, and it brought the major to his feet in hearty welcome.

"Sit down, Dick," he said. "Beautiful morning, ain't it? How are things out at the Silver Star?"

"The Silver Star's all right," Merrill answered. "But, say, I got a cablegram from Bob this morning." He explored a pocket. "Here it is. I wish you'd read it. Bob's in Italy — at a place called Rome — over there among them I-talians."

His tone was as disapproving as the pleasant Merrill tone could be. He deposited his husky length in a mahogany chair and waited for the major to adjust his glasses. The bank president read the message slowly:

Cable thousand dollars immediately, care National Express. Keep matter under hat. BOB.

"What do you make of it, Major?" Merrill asked.

The major smiled.

"It looks to me like somebody had annexed your brother's roll," he replied.

"That's how I figure it," Merrill said, also with a smile. "He's been in Italy less than a week too — they work fast, them boys. Bob had $2,000 small change, along with all his tickets, which he bought from this man Cook in New York. I hope they didn't clean him out of those too. Well, it serves him right for wandering off the range. He ain't got no business over on the other side."

The major cleared his throat.

"I don't wish to seem inquisitive," he said. "But I was utterly at a loss to understand your brother's sudden dash for Europe, particularly at a time when the nations over there are engaged in the most bloody and terrible warfare —"

"A woman," interrupted Dick Merrill. "It was a woman that done it. Maybe you remember her — Celia Ware — she used to sing at church concerts hereabouts a few years back."

"Ah, yes, I have heard her sing," said Major Tellfair reminiscently.

"You'll hear her again," said Merrill. "I reckon you don't pay much attention to such things, but old Bob sure was far gone on her. And she seemed to think a heap of him too."

"Naturally," nodded the major.

"But when it came to a showdown she picked her art. Wedded to music she was. Went over to Italy to get better acquainted with it. Bob got a letter from her 'bout a month back:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wants to divorce her art now. Maybe it's grounds of nonsupport, maybe the war's upset her, maybe she just naturally loves old Bob — I don't know. Anyhow, she told him to come for her, and they're to be married over there: in Florence."

"Miss Ware struck me as a singularly attractive young woman," responded the major. "I'm sure I congratulate your brother most heartily."

"Oh, Celia's all right," said Merrill. "How she'll pan out on a ranch I don't know, but she's a mighty fine girl, even if she did drag poor old Bob all the way to Italy."

"We must send him his thousand," mused the major. "No man wants to be broke on his wedding day."

"Sure: dig into his account and send it along," agreed Merrill. "He's boss, and it's his money. Shoot it to him. Only I wish he hadn't been so all-fired brief. I wonder what happened. Bob's too childlike and simple to wander around among them I-talians. Somebody got to him. I wonder — oh, well — Send him the money, Major: I leave it to you."

The major promised to attend to the matter immediately, and Dick Merrill, still wondering, set out for the Silver Star Ranch.

There was a rumor in that Texas city to the effect that Major Tellfair was growing too old and forgetful for the position he held, and, unkind as this assertion sounds, subsequent events seemed to justify it. The gentle old president turned back for a moment to his newspaper. Shortly after, he was interrupted by the cashier, who had an important matter to discuss. The cabled appeal from Bob Merrill slipped out of sight on his cluttered desk, and for two days the Texas ranchman waited in Rome.

He might have waited indefinitely had not Clay Garrett, the aged Negro custodian of the bank, been a devotee of that art which made Caruso wealthy. On the third day following the visit of Dick Merrill to the bank, Major Tellfair entered at two minutes past nine in the morning to hear Clay giving a spirited rendering of a favorite song. Fortunately for Bob Merrill, two lines of that song reached the ears of the major:

Darling — Ah am growin' ol' —
Silver threads among the gol' —

Silver! The Silver Star Ranch! Bob Merrill's cablegram! In an agony of remorse the old major rushed into his office, unearthed the message, and sent the $1,000 speeding toward Italy. Then he returned to sit before his desk in humble and pathetic contrition, while the sneers of his enemies regarding his age and absent-mindedness filled his thoughts. He was a most unhappy man.

Perhaps he would not have been so unhappy had he known that by those two days of delay he had done Bob Merrill a most unexpected service. For he had caused the ranchman to break his sacred contract with Thomas Cook & Son to leave Rome on an appointed day, and thereby enabled him —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But we are far, far ahead of the story. Offensive to the schools of short-story writing it must be when we confess that the incident already related bisects squarely the tale we have to tell. The most seemly thing to do then is to go back quietly to the beginning — back to that rainy Saturday morning when the little Italian liner slipped away from the fog-engulfed pier in the North River, New York, carrying Bob Merrill ultimately to his ladylove, but first to the Adventure of the Ebony Stick.

Though Celia Ware's letter of surrender warmed his pocket, there was a homesick twinge in the heart of the big ranchman as he watched the towers of Manhattan fade back into the mist. Little enough he had in common, it is true, with the great city of cabs and cabarets, but as the scene of his farewell to his own beloved land it suddenly took on, for him, a new and tender interest. The 5,000 miles of restless water he was about to cross appalled him in prospect, and Naples, his destination, struck on his ears like the name of some new, unexplored planet. Nevertheless, like the true knight he was, where love led he followed. If you could have seen him there at the rail, broad-shouldered, handsome, with the look of one who would always be a boy at heart, you would not have wondered that in the letter now resting in his pocket, Celia Ware renounced forever her cherished career. In a hundred galleries abroad she had seen the figures of men great artists had thought worthy of their marble, and her waiting lover suffered in comparison with none of these.

A wall of fog had risen now between Merrill and the country he was leaving, but still he stood at the rail, lonely and staring. A noise at his elbow brought him round, and he saw standing behind him a neatly tailored young man with a face so friendly and smiling that his own smile at once returned.

"Some little disappearing act the old burg did this morning," said the young man, pulling his cap down on his head. "Now you see it and now you don't. This your first trip over?"

"First offense," Merrill confessed. "How about you?"

"My 71st crossing; actual count," responded the stranger with a bored air.

Merrill gasped. "Business, eh?" he inquired.

"Business," assented the other, a queer little look in his eyes. "As we're to be two weeks together on this hopeless old tub, we ought to get acquainted. My name is Henry Howard Fisher."

Two days Merrill had spent in Manhattan, and his heart was hungry for companionship. Quickly he revealed his name, mentioned Texas, the Silver Star, and suggested a drink.

"Sorry," said Mr. Fisher. "I don't touch it."

"Come and have a cigar then," Merrill offered. It developed that neither did the abstemious Mr.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fisher smoke. Merrill looked him over again, a trifle suspiciously this time. Men were not made thus in the neighborhood of the Silver Star. But Fisher's face was frank and winning, and he was delighted, he said, to accompany Merrill to the smoking room for a chat.

Comfortably seated, Mr. Fisher regarded the ranchman thoughtfully while the latter made known his wants to a steward. Then with a somewhat satisfied air he took up, and showed himself a master of the waning art of conversation. They spoke of the war. Mr. Fisher touched lightly on the matter that was now taking him abroad. It seemed that a rich tract of land which he owned in the neighborhood of Naples had been atrociously taxed because of Italy's recent entry into the great conflict, and he was going over to adjust the matter. A terrible bore, said he, sighing. He inquired as to the route of Bob Merrill, and the ranchman explained how Cook, friend of tourists, had arranged everything in advance.

"Cook picked me up this morning after breakfast in New York," he laughed, "and he won't drop me until after dinner on the night of the 20th of July, when I land back in the North River. Tickets, hotels, everything bought and paid for, and, you might say, in my pocket."

Fisher laughed. "You might as well send your trunk," he said.

The satire, however, was lost on his friendly audience. Merrill took out a typewritten route sheet and read:

"Land Naples eight o'clock Saturday night, June 10, stop Grand Hotel du Vesuve; June 11, breakfast and lunch at hotel, take train Statione Centrally 3 P.M. for Rome, dinner on train, arrive Rome 7 o'clock, stop Hotel Quirinal —"

"You don't stay long in Naples," Mr. Fisher commented.

"Friend," replied Bob Merrill, "I don't stay long anywhere until I get to Florence. Expect to do a little sightseeing on the return trip to Naples, where I get a boat back home. You see, Mrs. Merrill will be with me then."

And to this stranger he frankly told what took him abroad.

"Youth on the prow and pleasure at the helm," quoted Mr. Fisher delightedly. "It certainly is refreshing to find somebody going abroad on a happy errand in these war times." He looked Merrill over again. "By the way," he added, "have you been down to arrange for your dining-room seat, or did Cook do that for you too?"

This was something Cook had left to Merrill's own initiative, and Mr. Fisher accompanied him to the dining saloon on the errand. Thus it came about that the ranchman and the pleasant Fisher were seated side by side at the same table for the crossing.

The little dining saloon was crowded at that first luncheon, but it was the last time for many days that all its seats were filled. For it developed that the mist which engulfed New York was but the western fringe

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a tremendous storm. For five days the liner struggled in the angriest of seas. One by one the passengers disappeared and were seen no more. Each night Bob Merrill's sleep was disturbed by his bright new steamer trunk rolling as the ship rolled, back and forth, back and forth, across the floor of his narrow stateroom. Frequently he heard outside in the companionways the crash of chinaware as stewards carrying trays were hurled against the walls. It was a new experience for the Texan; he was awed by the power of the sea, but unafraid. And with a little group of the faithful he appeared three times daily in the dining saloon.

Fisher, hero of 70 crossings, was, of course, one of that group, and he complimented the ranchman on his digestion. In those five days, when the rain was on the sea and the liner almost helpless in the wash of the waves, their isolation brought them very close together. They began to know each other by their first names. To the man from Texas his new-found friend was more or less a mystery. Sometimes Fisher seemed very young to him; he looked again, and there were many marks of age on Fisher's face. Sometimes he thought the stranger the frankest of men; at others, he discovered a sly look that worried him.

But Fisher's polished manner, his interesting fund of talk — which was but rarely of that tax on the acres of Italy which was his immediate worry — fascinated him as well as all the others aboard with whom the man came in contact. Fisher had a charming way with women; three children who were immune from the sickness worshiped him at sight. There was but one person on the boat — a little old lady who looked the sewing-circle but was a famous traveler — who seemed to find his courtly manners displeasing.

Often the ranchman tried to discover some business connection of his friend, but in vain. "You'll find a volume of my poems on sale at Brentano's in New York," said Fisher one day, and thereby became an even greater mystery to the Texan. Indeed, save for those acres in Italy, no earthly business seemed to hold him.

The fifth day the rain ceased, and the waves began to calm. A few of the suffering passengers crept cautiously on deck. That night the moon they had all forgotten crept through the clouds and poured its silver on the sea. After dinner Bob Merrill sat in a deck chair, looking out over the tossing waters. He was alone with his thoughts, which were of the vast dimensions of the world in which he lived. For five days they had plowed on, seeing nothing save one small fishing boat. For nine more days, over 3,000 miles of water, they were still to plow. In awe and reverence he considered these things: how the world was so much greater than he had ever dreamed, how the Silver Star back there in Texas was but an unimportant atom in God's huge scheme of earth and water. Suddenly, through a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

porthole behind him, came the voices of two men in the lounge: "Well, well, well! Why, I got a brother in the paint business in Dubuque." And the answer: "Say, ain't it a small world after all."

At this ridiculous interruption to his thoughts Bob Merrill threw back his head and laughed. And the little gray lady who looked so sewing-circle, striding by on her evening constitutional about the deck, paused before him, then dropped into the chair at his side. "It surely does me good to hear a laugh like yours," she said. "Would you tell me the joke?"

He told her, and she joined him in his mirth.

"A small world," she remarked scornfully. "I guess not. I guess I know. I've been traveling in it more than 30 years: just going on and on. The uneasy woman, boy, you see her in the flesh."

"Seems to me it's dangerous for you to travel in Europe now," said Merrill.

"I hope so," she answered. "Danger's great fun. My sister and I were stoned in Spain during the Spanish-American War. How Nellie enjoyed the thrill! She used to travel with me, Nellie did. Died last year in Australia, poor dear. I brought the body home, and then I started out again. It's lonely without her, but I can't stop. Got to go on. Russia, Turkey, China, the Philippines — all the countries you can name — I've been there. Can't stop. The uneasy woman. I'll die on the road."

With wonder in his eyes, Bob Merrill, the timid traveler, gazed at the frail little woman beside him. She leaned closer.

"Something I've been wanting to say to you," she went on. "Don't think me an old busybody, boy. You told me it was your first crossing. I only want to be of service to you. I've been on the road a long time. This — what does he call himself — this Henry Howard Fisher? You and he are pretty thick."

"I reckon we are," Merrill admitted.

"He's been on the road a long time too," the little woman said. "Lots of names he's called himself. I forget them now. But I've met up with him many times. What a splendid, what an inventive, mind he has! What a magnificent crook he is!"

"Crook!" said Merrill, sitting up.

"Exactly," answered the woman. "Hard to believe, isn't it? Even after her 10,000 was gone, it was hard for my friend, Mrs. Markham, to believe. She'd read his poems. I have too: they're beautiful. It was hard for Joe Deming to believe. Joe was consul at Rio — gave this Fisher all his savings — 500. Why? Fisher asked for them: so pretty." She laughed. "I've seen many of them at work," she said. "Fisher is the best. Go on mixing with him if you like: to know him is a liberal education. But sew your money up tight, boy, and laugh at him if he talks business. If you do that, there's no reason why you shouldn't mingle with a very charm-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing man of the world at little cost to yourself. I'll be going on."

"Wait," cried Merrill. "I appreciate what you've done. I —"

"Don't thank me — think," said the little old lady, and was gone.

Merrill thought. Had a man cast this slur on the honor of his new friend, he would have been quick and hot to defend him. But he saw in the eyes of this eccentric old lady nothing but sincerity and truth. She was no doubt quite right. She had been about a bit. She knew. His delightful companion of the decks and the saloons was nothing but a con man de luxe.

Later that evening, during a pleasant chat with Fisher in the smoking room, came his opportunity to make use of his knowledge. Fisher had been watching while the ranchman sipped a highball — liquorless and smokeless himself, as always. Suddenly he leaned across the table, and his face was as old and worried as Merrill had ever seen it, though he sought to keep his tone light.

"Bob," he said, "I don't mind telling you: I'm in a deuce of a hole owing to that land of mine near Naples. They've put a heavy tax on it, and I can't pay. The land's worth much more than the tax, but I'll lose it if I don't come across. I've been wondering — a first mortgage on it for the amount of the tax — could I interest you? We could run out and look the land over that morning you're to spend in Naples —"

He paused, for a most disconcerting smile had come upon the simple face of the ranchman. It was hardly what Fisher had expected.

"Just a minute, Henry," said Merrill. "You and me've been pretty good friends. Don't you go and spoil it all. Don't you go and try to sell me no option on Vesuvius. Nor any first mortgage on the dead city of Pompeii."

"What do you mean?" faltered Fisher.

"Just what I say, Henry," replied Merrill cordially. "Friends, yes. But if it's business you want to talk, the bars are up, Henry, the bars are up."

"You question my honor —" began Fisher angrily.

"Sure I do," answered Merrill. "Don't get riled. Have a drink — if you've been off the stuff to impress me. Have a drink and let's talk about art, or cattle, or poetry. But real estate — say, Henry, whose land was you thinking of giving me a mortgage on?"

Fisher sat staring at him a long moment and then, making his decision, broke into a laugh.

"By Gad," he said, "I like you, Bob. I'm glad you're on: it relieves me of the stern necessity of lifting your roll. I thought I had to do it — and, gosh, how I dreaded it."

"Now you're talking," smiled Merrill. "I've got a letter of credit in my pocket for $2,000, real money, along with my tickets and such. You've been trying for days to find out the amount: that's it. Now, Henry, you keep off. Let's be friends."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fisher looked at him admiringly.

"You're a wise one," he said. "I didn't give you credit. I was fooled because you hadn't been about much. Nobody could do you. I ought to have known it. You're a wise one."

"You flatter me," Merrill answered, "but it would be foolish to deny it's music to my ears. Now that our cards are all on the table, we can go on being friends as before. Why not, Henry?"

"No reason," agreed Fisher heartily. "I will have a drink if you insist. Yes, Bob, you've called me. You're a good judge of men, Bob. You're safe anywhere." He paused a moment thoughtfully. "Most men are as easy as children, but you —"

Late into the night his flattery continued. Expanding, he told of some of those he had swindled; random examples of the many from Rio to Dawson City, from Hongkong to Gibraltar. Bob Merrill listened. He felt that, as the old lady of the travels had predicted, he was gaining a liberal education.

The liner plodded on, into a world of sunny days and moonlit nights. To those who lived in that world, the thought of Europe bleeding to death began to seem a nightmare and a delusion. The decks, the lounge, the smoking room, were crowded now with many men traveling on many errands. Still daily in each other's company, the big clean ranchman and the hero of many shady deals spent much of their time. Fisher spoke no more of those mythical acres in Italy. His tongue was often oily in praise of Merrill as a judge of men; but mostly he confided, as in a friend he could trust, the thrilling tale of his exploits by land and sea. And Merrill, who ashore would have thought often of the police, listened and learned.

They touched one evening at Gibraltar, taking aboard several men, one or two of whom seemed not unknown to Fisher. At night, when the moon was high above the Rock, they sailed again, and there followed four days of the Mediterranean, with its waters now blue, now green, now purple, always lovely. Happy as was Merrill's errand in Italy, he grew to dread the day when he must step ashore. The little liner, with its endless odor of rubber companionway coverings, had grown to seem like home.

On the morning of the fourteenth day of their journey Fisher asked to see the typewritten page that held Cook's directions for Merrill, and he studied it for several minutes.

"Our paths may cross again," he explained, handing it back. "It surely has been great to know you, Bob. A real friend — one of the few I've known. If I'd had somebody like you at the start, I might never have gone into this rotten game."

Merrill put the list back into his pocket. He said nothing about meeting Fisher ashore. Though already dazed at thought of the strange country he was about to enter, it seemed best to him that he and Fisher should

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

part forever at the pier. He was sure Celia would not approve of his new friend. He was not so sure that he himself would approve of him — on shore.

Late that afternoon some clouds he had been admiring in a brilliant sky developed into mountaintops, and the bay which is said to be the end of human endeavor lay dead ahead. Breathless, for his life in the open had made him sensitive to the beauty of hill and sky and water, Bob Merrill stood at the rail. All the thrill that Columbus had got from the sight of our rockbound coast, Italy was paying back to the American at that moment.

Into his vision crept the hill of Posilipo, the low island of Capri. Then Vesuvius, crowned with its wreath of smoke, looking as the steel engravings had promised it should look. And finally the city of Naples, its white villas climbing from the water's edge up toward the gorgeous sky. Below Merrill, the steerage, with true Latin abandon, cheered and wept. They had come home again. The little Italian doctor came and stood at Merrill's side. His eyes glowed, and he pointed.

"See," he cried. "See, signor. That little patch of the white at the foot of Vesuve. That is my town: the town where I was born. Not in two years have I seen it. I go there tonight."

Merrill stood, trying to realize that in this glittering, unreal landscape men could point out a spot as home. The liner slowed down and took aboard passengers from a small launch that flew the Italian flag. The ranchman hurried below; it was time for dinner, but, like the others, he could eat little. However, Cook had commanded, so he made the effort. Then he went to his stateroom for the last time, to gather his hand baggage and tip his wistful steward. He was on the point of returning to the deck when the door of his stateroom opened suddenly and Fisher rushed in. His face was white; he trembled. He closed the door and leaned against it. "Bob," he cried, "I'm scared stiff. I'm sorry to have you see me this way. But I can't help it. I had to see you again."

"What's up?" Merrill asked.

"On the doctor's launch," gasped Fisher. "A woman — wife of the first secretary at the consulate — she was in Kioto three years ago. I got next to the consul there for some real money. She's come aboard to meet friends. I think she saw me."

He paused, very shaky.

"I get this way," he apologized, "at the thought of arrest. They've never got me yet. But it's with me all the time, the fear: it makes my life a hell. And when there's danger — like now — I feel all gone inside. You see, Bob, I'm a pretty poor thing after all. Not a man — like you. I pretend, but, Lord, I'm afraid." He shuddered. "You won't see me again," he went on. "I'm going back in the second class, and go ashore with them. Maybe she didn't notice me; maybe I just imagine. But before I go, Bob, I want to say goodye and give you a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little present. Something to remember old Fisher by."

He held out a walking stick, handsome, of ebony, with a very large gold handle, made in the image of an elephant.

"Take it," he went on quickly. "Keep it to remember Fisher by. I've carried it for years. I want you to have it."

"Why, I —" began Merrill. He saw that the stick was an expensive one. "I don't know that I ought to —"

"You mean — because I haven't gone straight," cried Fisher, hurt.

"Not at all," said Merrill. "Thanks, Henry. I'll keep it. Thanks."

"A present from Fisher," whined the other. "A gift to the only man he ever met that he couldn't swindle. For that's what you are, Bob: the shrewdest, wisest man I ever struck. Keep the stick — and goodbye."

He held out his hand. Merrill took it.

"Goodbye, Henry," he said. "If you ever decide to go straight — good luck."

Fisher mumbled something and slipped out. With a look about, to make sure that he had forgotten nothing, Merrill opened the door and followed. In his hand he carried the ebony walking stick; it was indeed a beautiful gift, and he looked down at it with pride. The gold elephant of the handle was very large, but not too large for a hand that for ten years had branded cattle in Texas.

Merrill went on deck. Dusk had fallen, and the stars were twinkling above the unlovely old warehouses along the waterfront. Like an ungainly lover sidling up to the lady of his choice, the liner was making clumsy efforts to dock. On the pier where they were shortly to land a black mass of people waited.

The ranchman stepped to the rail. Down below, the waters were cluttered with small boats, bearing venders of fruit and flowers. In one leaky craft a band of daring musicians twanged guitars and sang divinely, "*O-o-o sole mio* —" And there, faint in the dusk, were the villas, white and climbing; Vesuvius, with its eternal menace and its eternal romance, and over all the stars. Saturday night in Naples! Bob Merrill's heart beat fast. Truly, this was a land to come to in search of one's beloved.

The liner docked, and a gangway was dropped at an angle of 45 degrees to the pier. Before the passengers could go ashore their baggage trundled down into that now howling mob and off through many hands to the customs. Bob Merrill watched with misgivings as his trunk was carried through the crowd. His heart sank, for he knew he must follow and rescue it from excitable little men who did not speak his language. Landing in Italy began to have its serious side.

Then he remembered the stick in his hand. A gift to a man who could not be swindled. Was he such a man, he wondered. He hoped so. He was still hoping when someone gave him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a shove down that steep gangway, and the next thing he knew he was in Italy.

First to greet him was Cook's man, his blessed English voice rising heavenly above the clatter of a strange tongue. Merrill was rescued from the loudly raving hotel runners, and soon landed with surprising ease in the lobby of the Hotel du Vesuve.

That night he walked with the crowds on the Via Roma, amid the dandies, the cabbies with their eternally cracking whips, the laughing signoriñas. Head and shoulders though he was above the little men of this country, they awed him with their babble. Meekly he submitted to their picturesque extortions. He felt lonely, lost, overwhelmed.

And those delighted Neapolitans were quick to realize his state of mind. Dazed Americans had once been no novelty, but scarce they were in these war times, and the more to be cherished. Bob Merrill was a babe in their woods, and they made the most of him. Many hands were stretched out in impudent demand for his pennies, and as he filled them all he grasped his ebony stick the tighter, smiling grimly when he remembered why it was given to him.

The next afternoon a member of the band of 40 thieves, disguised as a cabman, landed him at the station, and he left for Rome as per the promise he had made to Cook. He reached his destination at dusk, and the capital city was a revelation to him. The street of his hotel was as modern as Texas; crowds thronged it, gazing into the lighted shop windows, gathering at the doors of the moving-picture theatres. Street cars clanged down it. To one who had got his ideas of Rome from a picture of the Colosseum by moonlight, all this was startling. He was given a room looking out on the Via Nationale, and all night long the rattle of trolley cars broke in upon his sleep. Yet just behind his hotel the ruins of Nero's time lay white beneath the moon, and across the famous Tiber the great dome of St. Peter's stood guard.

He awoke next morning from his disturbed slumbers a happy man. By evening he was to gaze again into the eyes that had so agitated his bosom in far-off Texas; he was to hear that voice which had been raised to such melodious effect in a dozen church choirs. Celia was lovely, she was feminine, she was his.

He had just finished shaving when there came a knock at his door, and without ceremony a bellboy ushered a stranger into his room. He stepped into the bedroom to find a small, swarthy Italian, with fierce mustache and shifting eye, waiting for him.

"Hello," said Merrill. "Who are you?"

"My most profound apology," said the stranger, "that I must thus disturb you. But it is of the greatest importance. I am in the service of the Government. You wish my credentials?"

He handed over stamped and sealed documents, and Bob Merrill stared

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

helplessly at the unfamiliar script.

"Can't make 'em out," said the ranchman as he gave back the impressive bundle. "But I suppose you came to look at my papers. Go as far as you like." And he produced his passport.

"Ah, yes." The Italian read. "This tells you are an American, signor."

"You bet I am," Merrill answered. "I guess that's all, eh?"

The Italian shrugged his shoulders and walked slowly about the room, glancing at Merrill's possessions. Suddenly he wheeled, dramatically.

"If you are an American, signor," he cried, "how comes it that you serve Italy's enemies as a spy?"

Bob Merrill had heard it was the common fate of travelers to be suspected, and he smiled pleasantly. But his heart sank. In this odd land of strangers he felt more than ever lost and alone. Could he make himself understood?

"Nonsense," he said genially. "Somebody has been handing you a fake tip."

"Somebody has made it known," the man answered, "that you carry papers of the utmost importance. I must search, signor."

"Search and be damned," the ranchman laughed. "I suppose it's your regular business. But make it quick, for I've got a date with a breakfast downstairs."

He stood at the window while the little man stooped over his trunk, hastily overturning the contents. At home, among his own kind, he would have taken the stranger by the scruff of the neck and deposited him elsewhere. But when in Rome —

"Nothing to it," he smiled. "You're wasting time. There's my valise. See — innocent as a babe — that's me."

The Italian had paused. His eyes were on a corner of the room, where stood the ebony stick. He stepped over and took the gold elephant of the handle in both his hands. It came off, and from a hollow in the wood the emissary of the Government removed a thin roll of paper and held it up before Merrill's startled eyes.

"So, you carry nothing, eh?" The Italian spread the papers out on a table. Merrill saw that the topmost sheet was covered with crosses, wavy lines, writing. "What is this? A map of the Champagne district in France: of trenches, of the distribution of forces. Information for Austria, a country with which Italy is at war. Signor, you are under arrest!"

Merrill passed his hand before his dazed eyes.

"Look here," he said, "I don't know anything about this. That stick was given to me: a present from a friend."

"Signor, the weakest of stories —"

"But it's the truth!"

"You will have the opportunity to explain: later. But I advise that you find some story more plausible. It matters little, however. You are captured completely. Prison, signor, and — perhaps — the firing squad."

"Prison nothing! It would take 100 like you to put me there."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Then the hundred shall be found."

"I'm leaving for Florence this afternoon. I've an appointment there: with a lady." Merrill faced him helplessly.

"Let us hope the lady is not too charming," sneered the other. "It will be many weeks before you see her — if ever. Do not keep me waiting, signor."

Merrill strode to the window. So Fisher was now a spy and had made use of him. It was plain enough. Somewhere along the line a confederate was to have relieved him of the stick. He looked out on that foreign scene that had made him so childishly helpless even before he was in trouble. He would be taken where few spoke his language, and his explanation was weak in any tongue. It was incredible. It sounded poor even to his own ears. Prison would surely follow. He recalled a line in a play he had seen: "Italian prisons are devilishly uncomfortable." Meanwhile Celia would wait, frightened, woeful.

"Come, signor," urged the little man.

Suddenly into Merrill's mind flashed a statement made to him several times by Fisher in the course of his tales of graft. It was to the effect that no Italian official was above a bribe, rightly offered. He turned and looked the Italian in the eye.

"See here," he said, "you've saved your country's honor. That's enough, ain't it? What will you get by dragging me off to jail? Nothing. If you could see your way clear to letting this matter drop I might make you a very handsome present."

The man drew himself up to his full height, which was little.

"You insult," he said, "me, my position, my Government. It is unworthy of you. Come, signor."

"Five hundred dollars," said Merrill. "No; I'll put it in your money: it sounds more. Two thousand five hundred lire — a neat little sum. Go out of here and forget what you've found — and it's yours."

The man smiled.

"My price it is cheap, in your eyes," he said. "No, signor — many times no." He came closer. "Ten thousand lire," he added softly. "Not a centesimi less."

"Two thousand dollars," Merrill answered. "You've got your nerve. Take me to jail." He put on his hat. "I suppose I can communicate with the embassy," he said.

"If you like," agreed the Italian. "Three other men of your nation, caught as you are caught, have communicated. It does little good. There are negotiations — what you call red tape — a long time is taken. Meanwhile you wait in prison."

Merrill paused. He cursed Henry Howard Fisher under his breath. He thought of Celia — of her happy, eager letter that had been waiting for him at Naples.

"All right," he said. "Come over to the bank with me and I'll cash in on my letter of credit. I'd like to fight this, but I can't afford to be held up now."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They went out into the sunlight, the Italian carrying the ebony stick. At the Banca d'Italia, Merrill showed his passport and canceled his letter, receiving in return ten Italian notes, each good for a thousand lire, along with a little small currency that represented the difference in exchange. Had there been an American behind the bars of that bank the deal might have fallen through. But here, too, everything was foreign, strange. They returned to the street.

"Here, you merry little grafter," said Merrill, "take your money, quick, before I brain you. You caught me with the goods, and no mistake. How about that roll of plans?"

"See," said his companion. "To Italy I am true. The plans, I destroy them."

And standing there on the street corner, he tore into shreds the papers Merrill had been carrying in the ebony stick.

"You might give me the cane," suggested Merrill. "I'd sort of like to keep it, as a souvenir."

"A thousand pardons," the Italian answered. "It is not good you should carry it. A stick of this style: it is better in my hands than in those of — a spy."

And he walked away down the street, gayly twirling the stick in his hand.

Merrill stood looking after him, chagrined that he had been so easy, yet knowing in his heart that he had done the only wise thing. To be dragged into court as a spy, particularly when the evidence was so hopelessly against him, would have been unthinkable at this time. Money came quickly at the ranch, and Celia's company weighed against ten thousand lire easily tipped the scales. He hoped, however, that he could keep the matter from the boys at the Silver Star.

He set out for his hotel. If he had felt helpless in this foreign land before, he felt vastly more so now that his pockets were empty and his credit gone. He searched for funds, and found only his tickets and a few lire that would hardly last the day out. Back at the hotel he sent his cable to Dick asking for another thousand. Fortunately he was able to charge it, though this was not included in the scheme of Cook, and he knew that now he could not leave Rome until more money came.

The hotel porter explained to him that owing to the difference in time the cable would probably reach Texas at an even earlier hour than that at which it was sent, and predicted that the answer would come back by evening at the latest. Merrill cheered greatly to hear this. But we have seen how that cablegram was swept into the discard on the desk of Major Tellfair.

The hour came when the ranchman was due by his promise to Cook to start for Florence, and there had been no word from Texas. He was compelled to send Celia a telegram stating that he was delayed. All the next day and the next he waited, fuming, won-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dering. Cook's arrangement served him no longer, and his bill at the hotel was mounting. He sent Celia frequent telegrams, charging them on that bill. He was a worried man.

But, fortunately for the ranchman, Clay Garrett was moved on the morning of the third day to sing *Silver Threads Among the Gold*, and thus woke the major to his forgotten duty. At three in the afternoon the money reached Rome, and Bob Merrill, much relieved, paid his bill at the hotel and took the four o'clock train for Florence.

On that ride to the lovely city of his happiness he was crowded into a second-class compartment along with five army officers and what appeared to be an Italian honeymoon. The afternoon was warm, the quarters cramped, and the scenery along the way not what he had been led to expect of Italy. But at the end of that journey waited Celia, and he was content to sit and dream, while the soft language of the country, being squandered on all sides of him, lulled his senses.

For three hours Merrill sat in his cramped corner, and then he decided to take a walk in the corridor. He strolled up and down several times, stretching his legs. His path led him past several first-class compartments at the farther end of the car. One of these had its door closed, its curtains drawn. Pausing reflectively outside, Merrill caught a glimpse beneath a curtain not quite down of two gray and natty spats. They seemed somehow familiar. He deliberately stooped and looked into the compartment. Lolling at his ease in a corner, the sole occupant, he beheld Mr. Henry Howard Fisher!

Smiling with joy over his discovery, Merrill thrust open the door and came abruptly into the presence of his erstwhile friend. At sight of the ranchman Fisher's eyes narrowed, but he leaped to his feet in cordial greeting.

"By Gad," he cried, "if it isn't Bob Merrill. I thought you had left for Florence several days ago. Your tickets from Cook —"

"I had an accident," said Merrill.

"So sorry. What happened?"

"Those little plans you gave me, Henry, along with the ebony stick. Of course you haven't heard —"

"Plans — what plans? Sit down, Bob." Fisher thrust Merrill down upon the seat opposite. "Hot in here, isn't it?" He took off the light-gray duster he was wearing to protect his faultless attire from the stains of travel. 'Don't you notice it — devilish hot? What was the accident, Bob?" And he carelessly threw the duster on the baggage rack above his head. His aim was good, but luck was against him. For Bob Merrill's eyes, following the duster, saw that from one end of it there still protruded a large gold elephant, the head of a handsome ebony stick!

For some seconds, with Fisher's frightened gaze upon him, Bob Merrill sat staring at the stick. And now at last into his simple, unsuspecting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mind there flashed the truth regarding the game that had been played on him. Anger swept into his heart. Fisher, watching, one eye on the door, saw and shuddered.

"W-well?" stammered Fisher at last.

"Well?" repeated Merrill sharply. He turned his eyes from the stick. "Well, Henry, you're shivering again. The way you were on the boat that last day. Sort of gone inside, eh? Afraid — Good Lord, you're afraid."

"What are you going to do?" Fisher demanded.

"I don't know," replied Merrill. "I'm a slow thinker, Henry. Be patient with me. Give me time. Blamed if your teeth ain't chattering. Buck up, be a man. You make me sick to look at you. The police haven't got you yet."

"You can't prove anything," Fisher cried. "Not a thing —"

"I know it," Merrill answered. "Come, Henry, try and be a man." The anger was gone already; the smile returned. "You ought to know I'm not the sort to run sniveling to the police. I'm just as afraid of the jabbering bunch as you are. I couldn't explain it to them in 1000 years. If you'll think back, Henry, you'll recall I paid high in Rome to keep away from them, innocent though I was. No, Henry: it won't be the police."

With visible relief, Fisher sank back into his corner. But his expression changed when Merrill added, looking at him critically:

"Not the police, but — you and me are alone here, Henry. I could break you in two with one hand, and throw the pieces out that window. That's what I ought to do, I guess. But I'm a tender-hearted man — on my way to be married. And it was a clever game, Henry, a clever game."

Fisher smiled wanly.

"Glad you appreciate it," he murmured.

"I'm no cry-baby," said Merrill. "You got my roll. That's about the end of it. I ain't sure I didn't have it coming to me, I was so all-fired stuck up over what you said about me as a judge of men. And the stick, you gave it to the one man you couldn't swindle. By Gad, Henry, you sure are full of humor."

"It enlivens my work — humor," admitted Fisher.

"Tell me all about it," demanded Merrill. "I ought to know: I paid high. That roll of plans, now —"

"Did you examine them?" asked Fisher. "Artistic work, if I do say it myself. Sat up in my cabin the last five nights working on them."

"And the gent with the credentials who called on me in Rome? Come, Henry, tell me all about it. Remember how you used to tell me all your pranks? Who was he? What did you pay him?"

"An ex-guide," said Fisher. "These are dull days for guides. He did it for a hundred. He would have stuck a knife in you for less."

"A hundred lire," mused Merrill. "Good profits, Henry. Better than the cattle game. I wonder now,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Henry, if you've got 10,000 lire about your lying, sneaking person —"

He stood over Fisher threateningly, but his late friend looked up at him without a trace of worry in his face.

"Look me over," he said. "I told you many times — it isn't my method to carry loot about on me. I've only got a little change. Those 10,000 are banked, old boy, banked where you'll never get them." He held up his arms. "Search me," he suggested.

"No use." Merrill shook his head. "Besides, I'm no pickpocket. Henry, it begins to look as though I'll just have to take my medicine and shut up. After all, I've got something out of the deal. I'll look out for the next man that flatters me. What a convincing liar you are, my boy!"

"I'm sorry," replied Fisher. "Really, I am. An artist looks at a sunset, and he just has to paint it. I looked at you, and you called out to the artist in me. I had to do you."

"And you was just plain lying," mused Merrill. "All that about my being a great judge of men, and nobody could swindle me —"

"Well, it looks that way, doesn't it?"

"A lesson for me, Henry. I'll never get puffed up again. And —" he glanced toward the gold elephant above him — "there is a little something you can do for me, after all. You can make me a present all over again. You can give me that ebony stick to carry — so that I'll always be reminded I'm the easiest fool in shoe leather. You'll do that, Henry?"

Fisher's jaws set.

"I will not," he said. "That stick is mine. I need it." The ranchman came closer. "It's mine — let it alone."

"My boy," said Merrill softly, "don't act up. I want that stick: I want it for a souvenir — a reminder — to keep me humble like I should be —"

"Let it alone!" Fisher screamed. He started to rise from his seat, when suddenly the huge fingers of the ranchman's left hand engulfed his throat. He did not speak again, but the shifty eyes that looked up at Merrill filled suddenly with a deep respect.

"Boy," said Merrill, "I could break you in two. Don't rile me. It ain't much I ask, just the ebony stick —"

"All right," gurgled Fisher, and Merrill let go. Fisher's face was bitter as he reached up and secured the stick. "Take it — from your old friend Fisher," he sneered, with a low bow.

"To the easiest mark you ever met," smiled Merrill.

"No!" snarled Fisher. "No! The old presentation speech still stands."

Merrill paused a second, thoughtfully.

"I'll be going back to my second-class corner," he said. "The high-grade company in this red plush compartment ain't to my liking."

He went out into the corridor, grasping his prize. Fisher followed him to the door. "Damn you!" he cried. "Why didn't you stick to that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cook's schedule? I banked on it. I said nothing on God's green earth could switch you."

"From now on," Merrill answered, "nothing will. Don't get in my way again. Goodbye."

In the corridor outside his own compartment he sought to spring the catch that should open the head of the stick but, ignorant of the secret, his efforts were in vain. In another moment he was surrounded by a restless crowd bearing luggage, and an officer of whom he had made inquiries earlier in the journey tapped him on the shoulder.

"Firenze," said the Italian.

"By golly, he means Florence," Merrill cried, and he dove in to get his baggage.

Florence proved to be the most lovely of all cities, for Celia Ware was waiting on the platform. A trifle more mature, a trifle wiser in the world's ways than when she left Texas to win fame and fortune, she seemed, but still the Celia of the joyous eyes, the heart-warming smile. Bob Merrill overturned citizens to reach her side. Then he took her in his arms and kissed her. The Italians are an emotional people, and the scene was not unappreciated.

They were married next day in the English Church of the Holy Trinity, and in the crowded, gorgeous time that followed Merrill thought little of the ebony stick, save once when he humbly related his adventure to his wife. Italy decked itself in the glad habiliments of summer for their honeymoon; the sea was glittering glass when they sailed over it for home. The last week in July brought them, happy, once more to the Silver Star.

On a certain very hot morning early in August, Clay Garrett opened the door of that Texas bank as the clock on the City Hall struck nine. Two minutes later, according to his custom, Major Tellfair entered, nodded to Clay and the boys, and passed on into his office. Another five minutes elapsed, and Bob Merrill, with the family smile on his face, strode into that marble interior, an ebony stick in his hand.

Major Tellfair rose quickly in welcome as Merrill entered the president's office. Certain formalities about the day and the Silver Star being disposed of, Merrill held up his walking stick. "Major," he said, "I told you the story of how I came by this cane. I reckon you remember —"

"Of course I do," said the major. "And I'm eternally sorry that I left you waiting over there in Rome —"

"Best thing you ever did," Merrill interrupted. "I reckon I forgot to mention that when that lowdown rascal gave me this stick the second time, as per my warm request, he said: 'The old presentation speech still stands.' I didn't gather what he meant at the time, but I do now. Major, sir — there's been a sequel — and a doggoned nice sequel, too."

"Indeed, sir, I am very glad to hear it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You know, I was so all-fired taken with the joys of matrimony I didn't pay any attention to this stick coming home. But last night out at the ranch I got to fooling with it, and the handle came off." Merrill reached into his pocket, and threw down a small bundle of thin paper before his friend. "Major, as my banker, what am I going to do with that truck?"

"Ah — um —" Major Tellfair studied the roll. "These seem to be banknotes issued in Italy, each for 1000 lire —"

"Correct," laughed Merrill. "And there's ten of them — ten nice new notes for 1000 lire each — the identical ten I handed over to a fake little government agent in the Bank Ditallyuh, or whatever you call it. That slick Fisher told me they was banked where I'd never get them, but he was wrong — dead wrong."

He leaned back in his chair and laughed again.

"Major, I'm a happy man. I'm married to the finest girl in Texas — and that means the world. And I went up against the slickest con man on the Seven Seas, and I did him. Yes, sir, I did him out of the 100 lire he paid that guy to get me."

"I'm delighted," beamed the major. "That was a lucky meeting of yours — that second one with Fisher. It begins to look like my boy Clay burst into song at just the right time."

"That's true," agreed Merrill. "I'd almost forgotten that. Yes, sir — Clay surely launched into *Silver Threads Among the Gold* at what they call the psychological moment. By the way, how about this stuff?"

"I'll send it to New York today," the major promised, "and have it translated into real money for you."

Merrill rose.

"Thanks," he said. "Just put it to my account, Major. I'm a happy man. But I mustn't get stuck on myself: that was the way I got done before."

He returned to the main banking room; Clay Garrett was loafing amiably near the door. Merrill removed a roll of bills from his pocket, took a twenty-dollar note from the top, and pressed it into the Negro's hand.

"That's yours, Clay," he said.

Clay staggered weakly.

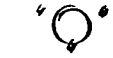
"Fo' de Lawd's sake, Mistuh Bob, what's this?"

"Just a hundred lire for you, Clay — that's all," Merrill answered.

"Liar? What yo-all mean — liar? Mistuh Bob, I swear I ain't —"

"No offense," laughed Merrill. "I just want you to have it, Clay. I like your singing."

He went out into the street, leaving a dazed but happy Negro leaning unsteadily against a marble post.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'Way back in our March 1945 issue we printed "The Curious Incident of the Dog," a first story written by Ralph Norman Weber who was then only seventeen years old. Seven years have passed, and we don't know if young Mr. Weber has had any other work published. Now we bring you his second story for EQMM, this one written when Mr. Weber was in his early twenties. Slow progress, yes — but we'll all hear more of young Weber one of these days . . .

THE HEAD IN THE BARREL

by RALPH NORMAN WEBER

HUR — RY! HUR — RY! STEP THIS way! You are about to witness one of the great wonders of the world. Ab-so-lute-ly free! And only a small part of the sen-sational show inside!

"I have here an icepick, ladies and gentlemen —" The barker waved his cane at the ten-year-old towheaded boy standing close to the platform, and lowered his voice, "Step away from the platform, sonny — a genuine icepick, ladies and gentlemen — see how it sticks in the planking." The barker flipped the icepick so that it stuck in the pine planking and quivered there.

Tommy didn't step back. How did the cane-and-derby man know that he didn't have ten cents right here in his pocket? True, he had no money and he knew he should be starting home, but after looking at the colored posters all afternoon, he didn't want to miss this free show. He didn't care if it was 5:30; nor did he care about the strange feeling he had that someone was with him, like a shadow hovering about him, a feeling so strong that twice he looked around. He was here now, despite his father's warning that it was all trick and bluff.

The barker turned to a dark-haired boy standing at the other end of the platform, next to a large barrel.

"Now, boy," the barker said, "get in the barrel."

The boy obeyed, and the barker placed a black cloth over the top of the barrel, stepped nimbly back and said, "Now, be-lieve it or not, I'm going to stab the icepick into the top of the boy's head. Are you ready, boy?"

A muffled, "Yes" came from inside the barrel.

"Raise your head so everybody can see it."

A round lump appeared in the center of the cloth. The barker raised his scrawny arm. In his hand the icepick gleamed. His face paled suddenly, and his lips drew taut.

Tommy was taking it all in — the derby man's grotesque, pasty face, in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

contrast with his orange-and-black striped shirt — the way he wiped the sweat from his forehead — sweat that came there quickly as he asked again, "Ready, boy?" And again the muffled "Yes."

Then a swift, decisive motion, and the derby man's arm, hand, and icepick swept down toward the lump in the cloth, like a scythe.

From the barrel, a long scream.

The derby man relaxed, his small, pallid face gaining color.

The dark-haired boy jumped out of the barrel and hurried inside the tent.

There were calls of fake, but some of the spectators bought tickets when the barker cried, "Hur — ry inside! See the lady cut in half! Right this way! The show is about to begin."

Standing alone in the sawdust, below the barker, Tommy wondered why people called the show a fake. What did they want — the real thing?

The derby man looked down at him, his black eyes as cold as his tone, "Okay, boy, you got no money. You want to see the show, free?"

Tommy felt the shadow hovering. A feeling welled inside of him, trying to pull him away. *Go home now! Quickly!* But he stood rooted there in the sawdust, a chill wind from the bay blowing him toward the platform and the barrel.

The sun was lower. Dinner would be on the table at home, but dinner could wait. Then why didn't he say yes? The icepick wouldn't go in his head. It was all trick and bluff. Hadn't his father said so?

Someone jostled his arm. Startled, he looked around quickly. A second crowd was gathering.

"I need a boy," the barker said urgently. "Get up here, towhead."

In the swift events that followed, Tommy forgot the feeling that told him to get away, to go home.

"Now, don't ruin the act, boy —" the derby man spoke rapidly in low tones, his head lowered.

Whether it was the low, hurried way in which the derby man spoke, or his own excitement at being up here on the platform, that caused him to miss some of the words, Tommy would never know. The derby man was whispering: "— should have been up here — mumble — mumble — right against the cloth. Got it now? Remember to scream loud."

Tommy felt his face getting red. He nodded his head.

"Get in the barrel, boy."

Tommy climbed into the barrel. In the dim light from the opening, he saw a cabbage in the bottom of the barrel. Vaguely, he wondered what it was doing there.

Faintly, from the outside he heard, ". . . sticks in the planking . . ."

What was the cabbage doing in here? He picked it up and placed it on his bent knees. He didn't want it getting in the way when he was ready to put his head against the cloth.

" . . . stab the icepick into the boy's head . . ." He heard a faint thud outside and remembered how the icepick had quivered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The black cloth came over the top of the barrel and cast darkness inside, reminding him of his feeling that a shadow was hovering near.

"Are you ready, boy?"

"Yes," he answered quickly, "I'm ready."

"Then raise your head a little higher so everybody can see it."

Tommy got out of his crouch and raised his head until it was against the cloth. Just as he did so, the events of the first show raced through his head. For one terrifying instant he was frozen there, his head against the cloth, with the realization that the cane-and-derby-man was out there, right now, with a real icepick in his hand.

"Are you ready, boy?" That would be the last time.

Cabbage! In the excitement the derby man must have said something about the cabbage. He *must* have! Tommy ducked down and grasped frantically at the cabbage. He managed to get it on top of his head and against the cloth, holding it on either side with his forefingers.

"Boy!" the barker yelled.

"Yes," he almost screamed, "I'm ready."

He heard the icepick crunch through the cabbage, and he screamed.

The crowd roared with laughter when he dropped a cabbage leaf outside the barrel, but they bought tickets anyway. They knew it was all trick and bluff.

Inside the tent, Tommy found that the lady cut in half was done with mirrors, but even as he looked at her, he was asking himself if the derby man had really said anything about the cabbage. He must ask him.

Outside, he looked into the black angry eyes of the derby man, eyes that seemed to bore into his, warning him not to speak. Tommy didn't ask the question, for he knew that here was the real show — a show that fulfilled all the promises of the posters on the tents and filled him with a horror about which there was no trick or bluff.

Tommy was sure now — the derby man had said nothing about the cabbage . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE FIFTH DIMENSION

by PETER GODFREY

Cape Town, March 16, 1950

My dear Inspector Joubert,

By the time you get this letter you will no doubt know all about me — or else I have underrated my old friends at Scotland Yard for the second time in my career. If they have not made contact with you already, I can assure you that they will reply exceedingly promptly to any query you may make. And among other things they will impress on you that I am most emphatically a man of my word.

I stress this latter point because, in my first attempt to test the intelligence of the South African police, I am about to make you a promise. But I will come to that later.

Firstly, let me tell you about the marvellous little gadget I have completed. Ever since I reached Cape Town three and a half weeks ago, I have been working on it night and day, and I am now very happy to report that it is completed. I have referred to the mechanism as a "gadget," because I feel that the description "infernal machine" is rather too pedantic to use between friends.

But I am digressing — a bad habit of mine which I hope you will learn to pardon.

This gadget of mine would never be taken for what it really is without the closest inspection — it resembles in every characteristic something so commonplace and innocent that it would never be suspected — and I intend to put it to practical use in the very near future.

Four people were killed on the last occasion I made a similar gadget, and I am hoping to improve considerably on those figures on the present occasion. The mechanism now controls an explosive force at least six times as powerful as previously. On the last occasion, the British press, in the absence of any direct evidence as to what caused the explosion, referred to "a bomb outrage." On this occasion I hope your journalists will use their imagination. A single bomb would be an inept description of the improved gadget. I will be most disappointed if they do not refer to the cause as a "stick of bombs."

You will be hearing from me with further details shortly. That is my promise.

Yours sincerely,
Tom Lereto

Cable from Chief Inspector Brentwood to Chief Inspector Joubert

New Scotland Yard, March 16, 1950

Re your query Lereto. This man is dangerous. Escaped January 17 from Broadmoor Asylum for the criminally

Copyright, 1950, by Publicitas

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

insane. Had no idea he had left England or would have warned you previously. Intensive search for him was being prosecuted here.

Lereto is aged 46, thin, slight, with dark graying hair and brown eyes. Inconspicuous and appears rational. Fingerprint classification: 1/1 U/U 00/00 10/30. Photos are being radioed. Hold Lereto for extradition.

Record: Responsible for bomb explosion in Bristol Post Office January 1949. Four dead. Responsible for release of poison gas in London subway March 1949. No fatalities but 32 hospital cases. Arrested while attempting to poison Dorking water supply April 1949. Committed to Broadmoor June 4, 1949. Escaped January 17, 1950.

Modus Operandi: Has delusion that his mission is to test the efficiency of the police force. Sends warning letters to the C.I.D. chief in the district where he contemplates outrage. Take any such letters seriously. Allusions in his Dorking letter caused his arrest. Medical opinion at Broadmoor is that Lereto will never commit offense without first sending warning.

Further details: Lereto is first-class mechanic, clock-maker, wood-worker, chemist, amateur actor. It is believed, but there is no proof, that he stays in the vicinity of the outrage to observe effects.

Please report developments urgent.

Cape Town, March 17, 1950

My dear Inspector Joubert,

Are you surprised at hearing again from me so soon? To be quite frank with you, I am so fascinated with the idea of the explosion I am organizing, that it would try my patience far too much to delay matters. Admittedly, I am giving you very little time, but I am compensating for that in other directions, as you will soon see. In any event, if you have not already cabled Scotland Yard for their opinions as to my sincerity, you will be able to do so today.

Zero hour is 11 A.M. tomorrow. Or rather, to be more accurate, at 11 A.M. sharp I will depress a trigger — a small spring — in my latest invention. The explosion will occur between four and seven minutes after that time. I am sorry I cannot be more accurate; you will, of course, appreciate that the gadget is a prototype — after gaining more experience, I hope to let you have the exact second of explosion in all my future models.

But again I am wandering from the point. I promised you more details; let me keep my promise.

Firstly, the place. I have chosen a large public building in the central area of Cape Town. I am afraid I cannot be more specific. Remember, I am testing your intelligence, and to go into more details would rather defeat that purpose. I have no desire to feed you with information to the extent that you are waiting for me when I arrive. But even though there are several public buildings, I contend that by a process of elimination, by mentally associating yourself with me,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you should be able to deduce which one. Take my advice then, Inspector — do not give way to panic. Choose your most comfortable chair to sit in, and concentrate hard. If you are patient enough, the solution will come to you eventually.

Secondly — but you already know everything. You know who will be responsible, the motives, the method, the time, the place. You know the four W's that journalists contend is necessary to cover all aspects of a report. You know Who, Why, Where, and When. Or, in the language of measurement, you know the height, the breadth, the depth, and the space-time of the problem. And that is what fascinates me. With all these details you still do not know enough to prevent the experiment. For that you still need another W — a fifth dimension.

Yes, that is what this experiment has, and what you must find if you are to prevent it. A fifth dimension . . . it sounds impossible, an impractical metaphysical abstraction, and yet it is true. Not only true, but a very simple truth, a self-evident truth. Maybe, in formulating this plan I have hit on an illustration — a very simple illustration — of a great truth which may one day be expressed in a complicated mathematical formula by a new Einstein.

But all that, of course, belongs to the remote future. You and I need only concern ourselves with the present — the hours from now until 11 A.M. tomorrow.

Need I stress that I will be watching your reactions with great interest?

Yours sincerely,

Tom Lereto

The place was Caledon Square. The date March 17, 1950.

In the early hours of the morning there was a long conference in Inspector Joubert's office, and for a time there seemed to be an abnormal number of thick-set men in plain clothes coming to and leaving the building. But from the time the city awoke, there was nothing in the conduct of police headquarters to indicate anything different from normal routine.

The tension was all confined to the four walls of Joubert's office, and it did not seep through to permeate the routine. Rather, it was the routine that edged into the room. . . .

In the charge office facing Buitenkant Street, Sergeant Koggel was on duty, and the normal number of uniformed men were in evidence. The good sergeant looked out of the window at the overcast sky, and waited patiently for the inevitable Saturday morning procession of friends and relatives coming to release the Friday night drunks. He paged through the occurrences book, and noted that all the drunks were named Smith, Jones, or Brown. That was an advantage — it meant that they were all old hands. Either their friends would come to pay their admissions of guilt without comment, or else they would be transported in bulk to the Magistrate's Court. In any event, they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would be dealt with swiftly, and that was all to the good. On this morning Koggel had special instructions. He was to provide the façade, the appearance of normality. No one should be able to guess from the appearance of the charge office that the C.I.D. rooms were empty, their occupants scattered since early morning, all looking for a little Englishman who wasn't right in his head.

Of course, if a drastic necessity arose, then Inspector Joubert . . . but Koggel did not want that necessity to arise. He had been given additional responsibility; he was on his mettle. The time was then 8:35, and he braced himself conscientiously as an attorney, whom he knew well, came to release the first drunk.

Upstairs, and even behind the closed door of Joubert's room, the silence in the other offices could be felt.

On the surface Joubert looked as dapper as ever; only those who knew him well would have been able to detect the signs of lack of sleep and strain. Both the other men in the office showed the same symptoms. Detective-sergeant Johnson's cheeks were not as ruddy as usual, and his usually clear eyes were red. Joubert's uncle, Rolf le Roux, gripped the stem of his pipe behind his beard, but for once he was making no attempt to smoke it. He was poring over a docket which contained two letters and a cablegram.

"I don't think we've left anything undone," said Joubert, "but just in case, let's tick off the points as they occur. First, even if we wanted to, we could not cover every public building in Cape Town, but in view of the information from the British police, I think we are quite justified in taking Lereto's letter literally, and concentrating only on those public buildings in the central area of the city."

He looked at the others for confirmation. Both nodded.

"Right. Then as far as city buildings are concerned, we can eliminate several major headaches — the railway police are taking care of Railways and Harbours property. That leaves us the House of Assembly, the Senate, the various government offices, the Post Office, the Library, the South African Museum, the Art Gallery, the Magistrates' Courts, the Revenue Office, the Provincial Administration Buildings, the Supreme Court, the City Hall, the Cape Archives, the Michaelis Art Gallery, the Koopmans de Wet House, and the Martin Melck House. Oh, yes, and of course the Castle — but the military are in control there, and don't need us. Anything I've left out?"

Johnson said, "You know, there are several other buildings which might be called 'public.' What about the Technical College? And the various banks?"

"Well, we've got to take a chance on them — although they will be partly covered by the squad we've got on the round-city beat. At 11:00 there'll be at least one man covering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

each of these places. All the same, I've got the feeling that when Lereto used the word 'public' he was using it in the sense of 'publicly-owned.' What do you think, Oom?"

Rolf said, "I think you are right, and for that reason can exclude the banks. On the other hand, the Technical College *is* publicly-owned. It is hardly likely Lereto will choose that building — his letters seem to indicate a place of more general importance — but can you afford to take that chance?"

"No," said Joubert, and then, "Johnson, when you go out at 10:30, pull the men off the banks, and concentrate them as a squad to guard the Tech. Same principle as the other squads. Watch out for suspicious characters, clear the building completely just before 11:00, and allow nobody to come near until at least 11:30."

"Or until I hear an explosion from another part of town." But this time Johnson was not being facetious.

Downstairs, Sergeant Koggel had reached his first crisis of the morning. He explained for the fifth time: "But I tell you, if you wish to lay a charge, or give any information, you must do it through me. You can't go upstairs."

"I am not going to give my statement to a — a — " — the little man suddenly noticed the stripes on the sergeant's arm — "to a mere corporal. What I have to say is very important, a matter of life and death. There have been people in the past who have been killed, and I want to prevent more murders. I must see someone at the head of affairs."

Koggel scratched his head, pondered, called a uniformed man over to take his seat, and went into the next room, where he used the telephone.

"It's like this, Inspector," he said, "he refuses to give his statement to me, and he says he's got information about some murders that have happened, and about some that are about to happen. Will you speak to him?"

Joubert said, on inspiration, "I'll hang on. Go and ask him, Sergeant, when these other murders are likely to occur."

He put his hand over the mouthpiece and explained the situation to Rolf and Johnson. "It's just possible," he said, "that we're having a colossal stroke of luck. Maybe it's someone with information about Lereto."

The sergeant's voice scratched over the wire. "Hullo. Hullo, sir."

"Yes?"

"He says the other murders will happen this morning."

"Then send him straight up," said Joubert.

The little man came in under the wing of a uniformed policeman. He took the chair offered to him, and the words came tumbling off his tongue. "I *had* to see you today," he said. "There may be many people murdered. And there have been murders in the past. I would have come before, only, you see . . . there were family reasons. My sister — I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

am afraid my sister is very much involved. But today — well, I felt I could not stand by and do nothing any longer. I —"

Joubert said, "All right. Be calm. Let's start right from the beginning, shall we? Get everything down in proper form. First of all, your name?"

"Borgia," said the man, "Cesare Borgia."

Not much time was wasted; within the space of fifteen minutes Doc McGregor was fetched from the magistrate's court, delivered his verdict — "mad as a coot, but harrmless, definitely harrmless" — and the man who thought he was the scion of a medieval family was safely in the cells.

"If only," said Joubert, "the Minister had let me do what I wanted and broadcast a general warning to the public to stay away from the central area of the city this morning, I'd have had far less worries."

Johnson asked, "What was his objection?"

"Oh, a dozen reasons. Disrupting commerce, causing panic, creating a situation where Lereto will be afraid to come into the open, and so minimizing our chances of catching him, and so on."

"You know the public," said Rolf. "Would a broadcast warning have had the effect you wanted? Don't you think there would have been more of a headache for you trying to keep everyone out of the area, than there is under the present plan?"

"Perhaps, Oom. All the same, it's not very pleasant sitting here, knowing that if all your squads don't work with maximum efficiency, some people stand the chance of being blown to smithereens. And whatever the Minister says, I'll be the one whom the public will blame."

Rolf was thoughtful. "And yet, Dirk, perhaps just by sitting here and thinking you will solve the problem."

"That's what Lereto says, yes. But why should I believe him?"

"If you believe other things he has said, then why not this? I still feel we haven't gone deeply enough into this matter."

"I've had enough of thought," said Joubert. "What I need now is some action. After all, look at the time. 10:20." He grinned. "Let's say I could concentrate a squad, give them adequate instructions, and take them to the site, all within ten minutes. That would leave exactly half an hour. It took Einstein 30 years to discover a fourth dimension. I don't fancy my chances of finding a fifth in 30 minutes."

"All the same," said Rolf, and he went on speaking, and at that moment Mr. Lereto, carrying his invention, arrived at the site of his projected experiment. Early, of course, but that was as it should be. No risk of being delayed elsewhere when the City Hall clock struck 11:00. No risk of being unfair to the police. . . .

Constable van Staden of the Railway Police walked the length of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Platform 1, and then came back slowly towards the concourse. He looked at his watch, and not for the first time. The hands showed 10:22. All quiet now, but in exactly thirty minutes he and the other constables on duty and all those others who were keeping in the background would have to swoop to clear the station building by 11 A.M. In the meantime, his instructions were to look out for a man. . . .

He saw him, standing near the entrance to the ladies' waiting room, a thin middle-aged man with graying hair and a furtive expression. He was carrying a suitcase.

Van Staden stared at him, and the man caught his stare. He looked about him nervously, put the suitcase down, and moved away a few steps. Van Staden started to walk towards him.

The man moved farther away, turned, sidled, and suddenly bolted down the length of Platform 6. He had a good start on the uniformed man, but van Staden had won his heat in the 100 yards at the police sports. At the end of the platform he was a mere five yards behind the fugitive.

The man was in an ecstacy of panic. He jumped to the tracks, ran along them, peering white-faced over his shoulder at his pursuer.

There was a train coming, but it was on the next line.

And van Staden still gained, and just as the oncoming train was passing, his reaching fingers tucked in the collar of the man in front. And the man, teeth bared like a fox, swung round and kicked van Staden in the groin, and he kicked again to loosen his grip, and he bucked and skidded and twisted to escape, and somehow he misjudged his distance as he came loose, and he ran straight towards the last coach of the passing train.

To van Staden, contorted in agony on the ground, it seemed the fugitive had managed to stop himself just before the moment of impact, but he knew this was an illusion when the body spun round and toppled, and lay looking towards him without a face.

In the meantime, the plainclothesmen who had observed the start of the chase swooped down on the suitcase. They picked it up gingerly, carried it carefully to a car, and took it to where the military explosives expert was waiting with his equipment in the centre of a bare expanse of reclaimed foreshore. They gave him the suitcase and retired to a safe distance.

They saw the expert immerse the case in water, and work over it for several minutes. Finally, he brought the suitcase back to the detectives. "Nothing explosive in here," he said.

One of the men, curious, opened the case and began pulling out saturated clothing. At the bottom of the case was a biscuit tin, and the lid was closed. He looked up dubiously.

"It's okay," said the expert. "I've had it open already. Nothing dangerous. Funny sort of smell to the stuff, though. What is it, anyway?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He added the last question because the man had opened the tin and was looking at the contents with familiarity.

"Dagga," * said the detective.

Joubert said, "In fact, not only don't I like hanging around doing nothing, I don't see why I have to. I'm going to take over your round, Johnson. You can hang on here in my place."

"But Dirk —"

"Dirk nothing. I'm not your friend this morning. What you've just heard is an order from your superior officer."

Johnson shrugged and grinned resignedly. "Well, if that's the way it's got to be —"

Sergeant Koggel's embarrassed face followed his knock on the door. "Sorry to trouble you, Inspector, but there's another person here who insists on speaking to someone in the C.I.D. A lady."

Joubert said, "Who is it this time? Helen of Troy?"

"No, sir. A Mrs. Stanger. Mrs. Emily Stanger."

"And what in blazes does she want?"

"Well, you see, sir, it's like this. She was here about a week ago, and gave a statement to Detective Marais about a handbag of hers that was snatched. Now she wants to add something to the statement. She's seen the man since, and knows where he's working. You see, sir, Marais being away, I thought if you wouldn't mind —"

"You mean she's making your life a misery down there? All right, seeing I'm going out, I don't mind if you do bring her up. Johnson will attend to her." And then, "It's only 10:27, but I'm going to leave three minutes ahead of schedule. Are you coming with me, Oom?"

"No," said Rolf.

Johnson said, "That's right. You help me take down this woman's statement. I'll need your moral support."

"You'll have to do without me, I'm afraid. I'm going somewhere where it's quiet, and I'm taking the Lereto dossier with me."

In the open door appeared a uniformed man. With him was a little old lady carrying an umbrella and, with one and the same gesture, she smiled and opened the faucet of her reservoir of words.

Joubert and Rolf escaped.

Joubert went down the stairs, but Rolf le Roux turned into a room down the hall. He put Lereto's letters on the table in front of him, and tried to see beyond the words.

Fifth dimension. . . . Who, Why, Where, When, and — something else.

Lereto was right. There *had* to be something else.

Analyze it logically. Take the case first of a newspaper report. No, why take a theoretical case — here was a newspaper — take an actual report.

* Dagga: A powerful drug, similar to *bhang*, possession of which involves heavy penalties under South African law.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This tiny one here, at the bottom of the page. "Late last night," — that was the When — "thieves" — the Who — "broke into the Boston Warehouse in Castle Street" — the Where — "and stole several hundred pounds' worth of goods." And the Why was implicit, obviously — the thieves broke in to steal. And there you had a complete report. No, not complete. No mention there of the little things, those little things that must have been there — the psychological trademarks of the criminals, the *way* in which they did the crime, the shape, the pattern, the individual touches of method which made it quite distinct from a thousand other cases which the newspaper might describe with the identical Who, Why, Where, and When.

The shape . . .

That's what Lereto must have meant by the fifth dimension. And applied to his problem it means . . . the shape, too. His own psychological trademark. The devil! He said it in his letter: "But even though there are several public buildings . . . by mentally associating yourself with me, you should be able to deduce . . ."

Should be able, yes. By finding out the pattern, the shape, of his own mind. By mentally associating . . .

And the minutes stalked each other around the clock, and each movement of the hands tightened the springs of tension in the minds of the men who watched and waited . . .

In the Post Office, an elderly man dropped a parcel down a waste-paper chute, and was pounced on by the detective on guard. The man squealed his protests, and they were amplified by a woman who came up almost immediately. The man, she said, was her husband, a model father and grandfather, a pillar of respectability — and if he said that he had not dropped a parcel, then he had not dropped a parcel. . . . A postal employee fished up the bone of contention, and in a panic the man asked to speak privately to the police. In high terror, he told them he had dropped the parcel when he saw his wife approaching. She was a militant pillar of the Temperance Society. If she had investigated the parcel and found it contained sherry —

In the grounds of the House of Assembly, an overzealous detective-constable seized a man with a briefcase, who seemed to him to be acting suspiciously. Fortunately for the detective's future career his prisoner, the Minister of Justice, had a sense of humor —

To simplify his work, and in a spasm of ingenuity, detective-sergeant Corbett, who was guarding a lane at the back of the art gallery, erected a large poster: *NO ADMITTANCE HERE.. DANGER. EXPLOSIVES.* . . . A little fellow, with a hand-case and a stick and a surreptitious shuffling stride, disregarded the notice. Corbett jumped from concealment, and ran to intercept him. The little man heard him coming, whirled around with his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stick upraised. Corbett knocked him out with a single blow and dragged the unconscious form to a nearby Black Maria. En route to Caledon Square, the prisoner came round. He struggled desperately. "You cowards!" he yelled, and then, more quietly, "What do you want with me? I've got no money. I'm just a poor blind man." —

Eight women and four men, members of a religious sect, were also detained in various public buildings. All had been engaged in leaving, in strategic positions, bundles of copies of a tract entitled *The Hour of Doom Approaches* —

The hands of the City Hall clock moved on, and the police machine moved into well-oiled action, and they cleared the buildings they were guarding, and formed their cordons. But as the first chime of 11:00 rang out, Mr. Lereto, who was where he wanted to be, pressed what he called the trigger of his invention. . . .

And as the first chime of 11:00 rang out, Rolf le Roux saw, in lightning-flashes, the truth of the case. . . .

He saw the whole pattern, the egoism, the scrupulous fairness. The phrases and sentences . . . "Choose your most comfortable chair . . . the solution will come to you eventually." . . . "I have no desire to feed you with information to the extent that you are waiting for me to arrive." Of course! The place. From Lereto's point of view the most public of all public buildings. The building which housed Joubert's most comfortable chair — where he would normally be waiting. *Caledon Square.*

But where was Lereto? . . . He pictured the strangers who were on the premises, the drunks in the cells, the man who thought he was Cesare Borgia, the little old lady with the umbrella. "A first-class amateur actor." *The umbrella.*

The "stick of bombs" . . .

And while he was thinking this, the second chime was ringing out, and he was on his feet and on his way to Joubert's office.

Johnson said, "Whew, that was quite a session," but his voice tailed off. Because of Rolf's face.

The old lady had gone. *But the umbrella was still there.*

Rolf grabbed it, whirled, and ran for the stairs, and even while he ran his mind clutched at the thought: "It looks so very like . . . perhaps a mistake . . ."

And so, because of the doubt in his mind, when he reached the old lady in the doorway of the charge office, he did nothing except bow and hand her the umbrella, and say, "You left this behind."

She said, "Thank you," and even in that flash he could not be certain whether the light in her eyes was kindly gratitude or a searching, curious panic.

He stood catching his breath in the doorway, and he watched her walk sedately on the pavement, and start to cross Buitenkant Street.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Only, when she reached the centre of the road, she paused and turned.

And her turn was not of an old lady in doubt, but of a tiger at bay, and she leaned back like a javelin thrower, but the javelin was the umbrella, aimed at the doorway.

And in that infinitesimal subsection of a second, in that instant of poise before action, in that moment of tableau, she was whipped behind a blurt of smoke into another dimension.

The giant hand of the blast slapped Rolf to the ground, and while he was falling the noise came, deafening, and yet behind the deafness, crystal clear and from every direction, he heard the tinkling of glass.

He rose to his feet slowly, and he looked over the two parked cars, lying on their sides, and he saw there was no great damage except to the street, the mercifully empty street, where a little old lady had once paused in her walk to turn, and where now gaped an angry hole . . .

Dear Ellery,

Please excuse me for taking a leaf out of your own book and providing you with a postscript to the story. It is appropriate to the situation, however, because there is a method, implicit in the narrative, whereby EQMM fans can spot, with absolute certainty and long before Rolf le Roux reaches his own stumbling solution, the disguise assumed by Tom Lereto, the criminal.

Tom Lereto, informing the police in advance about his crimes, is, in effect, an inverted *Ottermole: and TOM LERETO is an anagram of OTTERMOLE.*

Once having spotted this point of identification, the erudite EQMM reader has only to go one step further. In Thomas Burke's famous story, "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole," the criminal (like his inverted namesake in "The Fifth Dimension") has another identity. Throughout the course of "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole," the criminal, as you will remember, is referred to as the Sergeant. Now, if the letters making up the word Sergeant are jumbled, another anagram materializes — E. STANGER — or Mrs. Emily Stanger.

All in all, I feel justified in saying that "The Fifth Dimension" is 200% fair to EQMM readers.

All my best,
Peter Godfrey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE HISTORY OF BEL *from the APOCRYPHA*

THE BABYLONIANS HAD AN IDOL called Bel, and there were spent upon him every day twelve great measures of fine flour, and 40 sheep, and six vessels of wine. And the king worshipped it, and went daily to adore it; but Daniel worshipped his own God.

And the king said unto him: "Why dost not thou worship Bel?" Who answered and said: "Because I may not worship idols made with hands, but the living God, who hath created the heaven and the earth, and hath sovereignty over all flesh."

Then said the king unto him: "Thinkest thou not that Bel is a living God? Seest thou not how much he eateth and drinketh every day?" Then Daniel smiled, and said: "O king, be not deceived, for this is but clay within, and brass without, and did never eat or drink anything."

So the king was wroth, and called for his priests and said unto them: "If ye tell me not who this is that devoureth these expenses, ye shall die. But if ye can certify me that Bel devoureth them, then Daniel shall die, for he hath spoken blasphemy against Bel." And Daniel said unto the king, "Let it be according to thy word." Now the priests of Bel were threescore and ten, besides their wives and children; and Bel's priests said: "Lo, we go out, but thou, O king, set on the meat, and make ready the wine, and shut the door fast, and seal it with thine own signet. And tomorrow, if thou findest not that Bel hath eaten up all, we will suffer death; or else Daniel that speaketh falsely against us."

And they little regarded it; for under the table they had made a privy entrance, whereby they entered in continually, and consumed those things.

So when they were gone forth, the king set meats before Bel. Now Daniel had commanded his servants to bring ashes, and those they strewed throughout all the temple, in the presence of the king alone; then went they out, and shut the door, and sealed it with the king's signet.

Now in the night came the priests with their wives and children and did eat and drink up all.

In the morning the king said: "Daniel, are the seals whole?" And he said: "Yea, O king, they be whole." And as soon as he had opened the door, the king looked upon the table, and cried with a loud voice: "Great art thou, O Bel, and with thee is no deceit at all."

Then laughed Daniel, and said: "Behold now the pavement, and mark well whose footsteps are these." And the king said: "I see the footsteps of men, women, and children."

And then the king was angry, and took the priests with their wives and children, who showed him the privy doors where they came in, and consumed the things upon the table.

Therefore the king slew them, and delivered Bel into Daniel's power, who destroyed him and his temple.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

During World War II, Anthony Armstrong served with the R.A.F., for which he founded and ran the R.A.F. Training Manual (known as the TEE EMM) and which was eventually printed on five continents. For the TEE EMM, Mr. Armstrong created the famous character of Pilot Officer Prune, the moronic, helpless type who always did everything wrong and who became so real that people actually believed he existed. Indeed, Pilot Officer Prune got his name in the official Air Ministry telephone book, and no less a figure than Air Marshal Tedder himself used to write to him. A portrait of Prune, by Raff, was even hung in the Portrait Gallery of London, in an exhibition of service men, and no one questioned Prune's right to be there.

Strange, isn't it, how all through the history of people and literature certain figments of man's imagination have become so human, so lifelike, that we accept them as real . . . Pilot Officer Prune, for example, used to be called up frequently on the telephone at the Air Ministry. Mr. Armstrong's invariable answer was: "Prune's not back from lunch yet" — even, you understand, when it was five o'clock in the afternoon. One day someone phoned, got the stock reply, and then pointed out to Mr. Armstrong that it was not yet noon; at which, with commendable split-second thinking, Mr. Armstrong said: "I mean, not back from yesterday's lunch yet!"

All of which, in our usual fashion, is wholly irrelevant, since you are now about to meet, not P. O. Prune, but the detecting Paintons, father and son — ex-Superintendent and Detective-Inspector of the C.I.D., respectively — in one of their most unusual deductive cases . . .

ONE-WAY STREET

by ANTHONY ARMSTRONG

IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR LITTLE MR. Harold Bent being apparently oblivious of the fact that the Trafalgar Square traffic went one way round only, the body of James Wellson would have been discovered five minutes later than it was. It would also have been discovered half a mile away from where it was. And even an extra five minutes and an extra half-mile can, of course, be extremely useful to a murderer, particularly in London.

It happened like this:

Released by the traffic lights, George Travers, taxi-driver, swung his cab round the southeast corner of Trafalgar Square and, mingling with the Whitehall stream in the usual criss-cross, dodge-as-dodge-can, made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the Pall Mall destination of his fare. As was his custom in all such traffic maelstroms, he kept up under his breath a running fire of malediction against vehicles cutting across him, vehicles which objected to his cutting across them, and above all pedestrians who seemed sublimely unconscious of the fact that vehicles even existed.

As a general rule, his widely-aimed obloquy was automatic and largely unnecessary, but suddenly it seemed for once justified. For as he reached the next corner a man, the above-mentioned Mr. Harold Bent, stepped off the central pavement and, narrowly missing a couple of cars, started across in front of George's taxi with his head turned the other way.

George immediately and indignantly squeezed his horn bulb to produce the two cracked and protesting squawks which should freeze the other to startled immobility while he rattled past; but for once it did not work. Instead of stopping in his tracks the pedestrian leaped wildly forward.

George swung his wheel with a blistering oath — too late. The taxi's wing caught the other above the left knee. His hat went flying in one direction, while the mackintosh he had been carrying spreadeagled itself in another, frightening the life out of George, who momentarily thought it was the body.

"—— ! First —— accident in eighteen —— years!" he ejaculated, scared and furious, as his taxi screeched to a standstill within a few yards. Next minute, however, he realized to his relief that the pedestrian, instead of lying bleeding to death in the road, had already scrambled up from the greasy wood paving and, having received his hat from one bystander and his coat from another, was limping angrily towards him. George's relief, however, was almost at once swallowed up in a vast indignation, for the other's furiously expressed idea seemed to be that it was all George's fault for driving on the wrong side of the road.

"Wrong side of the road!" he spluttered. "In Trafalgar Square there's only one —— side of the road. Why, you . . ."

But Mr. Harold Bent was not listening to him. He was now appealing vigorously to bystanders. "Might have killed me! I was looking to my right, wasn't I?"

"Didn't see nothing," cautiously replied a large, stolid man.

"Only saw you on the ground," said a little man with a muffler, also keeping out of the witness-box.

Baffled, the victim opened the taxi door and applied to the fare, ignoring both George's rumbling blasphemies and the petulant honking of a No. 11 bus behind.

"Look, sir!" he began. "You saw it all and . . ." He broke off and turned round. "Here!" he said abruptly to George. "What's up with your passenger? He's ill or something."

The gathering crowd surged forward to peer inside at the hunched

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

figure of a fattish, dark young man, who had fallen forward off the seat and was now collapsed on the floor.

"Thrown forward and stunned 'isself!" volunteered the large stolid man, knowledgeably inactive.

"Attack o' powmain poisoning?" suggested the man with the muffler hopefully, also doing nothing at all about it.

"Maybe he's only fainted from shock," put in Mr. Harold Bent crisply. "Loosen his collar or something. . . ."

But by then a policeman had plowed through the crowd and taken charge. He gently lifted the inert figure back on to the seat; then turned. "Any one of you people a doctor, please?"

"Any doctor here?" spread outwards like a ripple. A moment later a tall, black-coated figure materialized in the little open space round the door. He knelt in the cab, made a brief examination, then said to the constable in an undertone: "This man is dead!"

"Cor!" said P. C. Robinson, startled out of his stolidity for a moment. "Hrm! I mean, shock o' the accident, sir? Or hit his head on . . ."

"No," replied the doctor, still in the same low, serious tones. "As far as I can see he's been stabbed — there's the hilt of a dagger under the right arm. . . ."

A week had passed and two men sat in armchairs in a small, neatly-furnished suburban parlor. Pipes were going and a quart bottle of beer stood half-empty between them. An air of relaxation and contentment hung over the scene, in spite of the fact that the younger man, Inspector Painton, looked worried.

"I'm not happy about it, Dad," he said, chewing on his pipestem. "Here's this chap, James Wellson, stabbed to death round about midday in the busiest part of London, a quarter of a mile from Scotland Yard, and we're still just about where we came in."

Ex-Superintendent Painton, a large man who seemed to be built on the lines of a floating dock, grinned over all his chins. "And though, as old Osborn said, you're one of our most promising young Detective-Inspectors, you nevertheless want to talk it out, as usual, with your old father who's now on the shelf."

"Why you ever retired I . . ."

His father waved him to silence.

"Let's talk it over by all means. It does this so-called clear-thinking brain of mine good to tackle a murder problem again — so get going. I've followed fairly closely all that's got into the papers, of course."

His son's face brightened a little and he took some papers from his pocket. "Good. Now, as I expect you know, the taxi-driver's statement — without the blasphemy, which cuts it down by 40 per cent. — is that he was hailed about noon outside a pub near Oxford Circus by the murdered man. He didn't notice the man's companion particularly at that time — he had his back to him and got in quickly —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

except that he was short and wore a light raincoat, but no hat. Wellson — that's the murdered man — gave the directions — a destination in Pall Mall — but told the driver that his friend wanted to get off first at the southeast corner of Trafalgar Square. So he drives down Regent Street and Haymarket, and turns left for Trafalgar Square, but just as he gets to the near end of the National Gallery the murderer raps on the glass and wants to get out. He's told that this is the northwest corner, the southeast is at Charing Cross, diagonally opposite. He retorts that this is the corner he meant, and out he gets."

"So this is the first time the taxi-driver hears his voice? Don't mind my interrupting, boy: I'm just getting the picture."

"That's O.K. . . . Yes, and he says he had a husky voice, as though he had a very bad throat. It's the first time, too, he sees his face and notices he has a small black mustache. Also he's wearing brown gloves."

"So you found no helpful finger-prints on the door-handle, hilt of weapon, or elsewhere?"

"Quite right. Well, he tells the driver to carry on to Pall Mall, calls out 'So long' to his companion inside . . ."

"Who didn't answer, of course?"

"No. For by then obviously he was already dead, but probably propped up in the corner to look natural."

The elder man refilled his glass and then stretched his enormous body out more comfortably, as if to give his mind more scope. "What's your idea, son, about why he got out at that particular place?"

"Because he'd done the job."

Here his father nodded slowly to himself three or four times.

"He didn't want to stick around with the body any longer than he had to. He was right, too; because in point of fact it was only a few minutes afterwards that Wellson's body was prematurely discovered through a quite unforeseen accident. Not that it helps. Our murderer, a small man with a mustache — certainly shaved off by now — and a husky voice, probably a disguised one, is at large in London and we've no clue at all."

"What about the weapon?"

"No help. One of those thin, steel, paper knives, such as might have been bought anywhere, and sharpened to a keen point. Used with skill, of course."

The ex-Superintendent grunted, busied himself with refilling his pipe, then asked: "No clues from the Wellson end of the business?"

"Nope. The taxi's destination was only the corner of Pall Mall and St. James's Street — nothing to pick up there — while at the Oxford Circus pub all we've got is a barman who thinks he remembers him and that he was having a drink with a short man. But the place was very full and he was too busy to notice much. He says, however, that this other fellow, whoever he was, had no mustache, hadn't got a raincoat, and anyway, Wellson left the pub alone."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What about Wellson's background?"

"Not much to find out. He was unmarried and lived in rooms in Hampstead. Out all day — worked in an engineering firm. Lots of pub friends, but no definite enemies at this time. Unfortunately for us, though, he had too many potential enemies from the past."

"Meaning?"

"Well, he was a nasty bit of work — been reserved all the war on a sort of traveling inspector's job and specialized in playing about with wives in the various towns he visited, generally those whose husbands were away in the Services. Almost any wronged husband, therefore, may have had it in for him — *when* he discovered, which may not have been till he came home, some good while after Wellson's association ceased. Naturally it's almost impossible to check up on all these women — different towns over five years or so — particularly when he no doubt kept his affairs as secret as possible."

"Hmf!" went the elder man, in a baffled sort of way, and drank some beer. "You *have* got something to chew on, Jack, haven't you?"

"And even that motive's only guesswork — though I've checked Wellson's background pretty carefully and can't find another as likely."

"It's probably the right one. As a starting point, let's assume it is. O.K.? . . . Right! The murderer has only recently discovered that Wellson was his wife's seducer at some time or another, and is all out for the biggest sort of revenge. Now what? Did Wellson know who he was?"

"No," said the Inspector definitely. "Or he'd have avoided him for a cert. *Yet* he knew him sufficiently well to give him a lift in his cab some distance out of his direct route to Pall Mall. So it wasn't a chance taxi-sharing."

"Good point," agreed his father.

"So the other must have deliberately scraped up an acquaintance — object: murder. But" — and his face clouded — "*why* is it that we can't pick up any hint of their having been seen together at any time prior to the murder. We know all Wellson's haunts."

"Ah!" Ex-Superintendent Painton swallowed some more beer "This at last is where I think," he announced portentously, and closed his eyes. . . .

After ten minutes he opened them and emptied his glass. "I'm getting something, Jack," he said. "Hrm! You've made two false assumptions. . . ."

"Hey, steady, Dad!" cried the other, nettled. "You make me sound like a dumb flattie, not C.I.D."

"When you've been as long in the game as I have," began his father. "However . . . you assumed, correctly, that the murderer adopted a false voice to deceive the taxi-driver. But in the same breath, my boy, you assumed that his appearance — i.e. the mustache — was *real*. Why shouldn't that have been false too? In other words, though most criminals commit a crime and then 'disappear'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by altering their appearance, may we not have one here who changed his appearance solely for the crime? In other words, the murderer, as seen by the only witness, not only 'disappeared' after the crime, but never existed before it."

Jack Painton was forced to admit his father had got something there. "Which accounts for our finding no trace of Wellson ever being associated with a man with a mustache. . . . Wait! But surely the murderer wouldn't have suddenly put on a mustache to go in a taxi with a fellow who knew him otherwise?"

The elder man smiled tolerantly. "Oh, he didn't do that till after he'd killed him. In the taxi. Nor did he use his disguised voice till afterwards either. Remember, he got in quickly and the driver never heard him speak or saw his face till he . . ."

"I get it," said his son, with a touch of annoyance. "What you mean is that the man we've got to find is a chap associated with Wellson before his death, who wasn't disguising his voice nor wearing a false mustache. Easy!"

"No need to be sarcastic, Jack. At least we know he's short — he can hardly have cut his legs down for the job — and" — he puffed complacently — "wasn't a short man talking to Wellson in that Oxford Circus pub?"

"Ye-es. But he hadn't a raincoat, and he didn't leave with Wellson."

"Be your age, Jack! We're obviously dealing with a clever man. The pub was crowded and you don't notice everything in a crowd. Why shouldn't he have had his raincoat on a seat where the barman couldn't see it, and then put it on and left quickly when the fellow wasn't looking — but in plenty of time to catch his victim before he got a taxi? It's a hundred to one against his finding one waiting outside."

Inspector Painton considered a moment, then his face brightened. "You know, Dad, I believe that may be about the size of it. That brain of yours is still pretty clear. I'll get round to the pub myself first thing tomorrow, as a further check. . . . By the way, didn't you say I'd made another false assumption?"

"Oh, yes. You assumed that the murderer got out at that corner of Trafalgar Square because he'd just done the job. It doesn't ring true to me."

"Why not? What's on that clear-thinking mind of yours now?"

"I don't know," said the ex-Superintendent simply. "Give me time. And get me another bottle of beer. Don't bother about my mind yet: I've got a big frame to support."

After a long draught and five minutes' silence with closed eyes, he again stirred ponderously to life. "Yes," he said. "Yes."

"Spill it, you old has-been," grinned his son.

"Here's the fallacy. It wouldn't take long to do the job, and the natural thing would have been to ask to be stopped anywhere he fancied on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the direct route to Pall Mall. But he wants a corner of Trafalgar Square which is out of the way. Why? And he makes a mistake in the corner. Now! *Was* it a mistake?"

"Why not? Not everyone's certain of north and south and so on in London."

"All the same, supposing he *had* correctly specified the corner he wanted at the start. It's only a quarter of a minute's walk from the bottom of Haymarket. The obvious thing, therefore, would be to drop him there, and the taxi could at once turn right and go along Pall Mall. But, asking for the S.E. corner means it's got to go all round two sides of the Square to drop him and then come back along the third side, because Trafalgar Square is one-way. It looks, in fact, as though he wanted it to go right round and yet wanted to get . . . By God!" He heaved his vast bulk almost upright. "What a stroke of genius!"

"What is? What?" His son jumped to his feet in his excitement. "Do you think you've got it?"

"It's all Scotland Yard to a pickpocket I have," he rumbled in heavy triumph. "This murderer is a very bold man — killing a chap in a taxi in broad daylight proves it — but, if my theory is right, his next move tops even that for audacity. Listen! He's forseen that we might get on to his disguise and start looking for him as the real person, who existed before and after. So, ignoring what we could find out about him before, he's taken terrific care not to be suspected *after*."

"How?"

"Who of the persons actually connected with the case do you suspect least?"

Jack Painton thought. "Myself," he said, with a smile, "if that's what you mean?"

"That's right. Go on!"

"Well, the taxi-driver, the doctor, P. C. Robinson, who discovered the body, the . . ."

"*Did* the P. C. discover it?"

"Oh, no. The little bloke — what's his name, Harold Bent, who was run over, of course. . . ."

"And *there* you have him," chuckled his father. "Who *could* suspect the man who, by entire accident, discovered the body in front of a score of witnesses and was nearly killed himself into the bargain?"

"Well, I'm . . . but how?"

"Listen!" He spoke in short, triumphant chuckling bursts. "He was the short bloke in the pub: he nips out, putting his raincoat on, and gets his lift, concealing his face from the driver. Does the job. Then putting his mustache and false voice on, he gets out as soon as he has committed the taxi to going round three sides of Trafalgar Square. As it drives on, raincoat off, gloves off, mustache off, and hat on, taken from raincoat pocket. Then he nips down the fourth side of the square in plenty of time to involve himself in a deliberate accident with the taxi he's just left. He has only 50 yards to go, while the taxi has three sides of the square to do, to say nothing of a probable hold-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up at one or other of the traffic lights. He waits; along it comes; he starts to cross the road. Remember, the driver said that, instead of stopping short at the horn, he seemed to jump forward. *He* didn't mind risking a broken leg — all the better proof of innocence. In short, your star witness is also your murderer."

He coughed, finished his beer, and said solemnly: "Very good deduction by one of our most promising young Detective-Inspectors. You'll get full marks for it."

Jack Painton rang his father up next morning. "You're right, Dad, as usual, all along," he said. "Harold Bent's wife lived in a North country town where Wellson was in 1944. He seduced her while Bent was a P.O.W. in Burma, and she later on committed suicide in remorse, leaving a letter for her husband. After getting back, Bent spent a year trying to trace the man and only recently got on to him. Then he worked this dodge."

"Have you pulled him in, poor devil?"

"Er — no. And in a way I'm glad not to have had to do it. . . . You see, Dad, Fate's taken a hand in a queer way. Bent got run over yesterday in — of all places — Trafalgar Square, and died this morning. . . ."

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will bring you —

MacKinlay Kantor's THE MAN WHO VOTED FOR ULYSSES S. GRANT
George Harmon Coxe's GOING MY WAY?
Craig Rice's AND THE BIRDS STILL SING
W. Somerset Maugham's THE CREATIVE IMPULSE
Phyllis Bentley's AUTHOR IN SEARCH OF A CHARACTER
Stuart Palmer's THE JINX MAN
Thomas Flanagan's THE POINT OF HONOR
Roark Bradford's THE SHERIFF DECIDES
Victor Canning's A MATTER OF TIMING
Michael Gilbert's MRS. OLIPHANT DECEASED
Charles B. Child's THE INSPECTOR HAD A WIFE

and another unusual EQMM "First" —

Maxey Brooke's MORTE D'ALAIN:
AN UNRECORDED IDYLL OF THE KING

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT C. HATCH

ONE WONDERS A LITTLE BIT HOW this fellow ever entered the lists as a fictional detective. In the first place, he is not a detective at all, and in the second, his physical characteristics, both in person and in habit, certainly eschew forever any claim or rights to the mantles of Ellery Queen or Sherlock Holmes. However — he *is* a famous criminal lawyer, and if it were not for his indubitable talent for ratiocination, plus a well-blended skill at being able to point a finger at the guilty culprit, a certain captain of police undoubtedly would be less successful than he is. And certain friends of his would be left in jams from which they would find it next to impossible to extricate themselves.

He is so famous in a certain midwestern metropolis that he draws a crowd in every courtroom in which he appears, and he draws equal crowds in private life. Although far from being impressive at first sight, his courtroom manner is spectacular and famous, although this consists of but two characteristic gestures — the pointing of a dramatic finger and the pounding of a dramatic fist. His voice is neither mellow nor resounding; indeed, it has been publicly described as sounding like a pair of rusty old gates swinging in the wind.

In person he is short and stocky with a small paunch, and he has a red and perspiring face which he mops with a soiled and crumpled handkerchief at five-minute intervals, or whenever a pause for dramatic effect seems indicated. His thinning hair, surrounding a bald spot in the middle, is dark and invariably rumpled and perpetually in need of combing. He seldom is seen without a cigar in his mouth and from this a constant dribble of ashes bespatters his vest which well might be called the focal point of his general attire. This consists of a badly wrinkled suit, usually suggestive of his having slept in it — probably on the floor of a taxicab — a conjecture borne out by his nocturnal habits. To complete the picture, his ties and his collars, always dirty, seldom seem to be friends and often not even acquaintances — usually crawling under one ear or the other. His vest buttons usually are undone and invariably he has an untied shoelace.

You may think by now that you have seen him at his worst, but, by the authority of his creator, this is far from being the case. Despite the fact that he is said to make a huge income, he invariably is broke and overdrawn at the bank, his office rent in arrears, and his secretary unpaid. This condition of affairs is the result of such varying fluctuations of fortune as are brought about by a strong addiction to drink, a superb confidence (not always well-founded) in his ability to fill inside-straights, and a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

predilection for buying expensive gifts for members of the opposite sex. In fact, referring again to our authority, he frequently is alleged to be a souse, a dame chaser, and a gambler.

Nevertheless, he is a smart lawyer and surprisingly adept at elucidating a crime that seems insoluble. Tricky business is just the kind of business that is up his alley, and he makes his living by confusing people. Juries usually sit back and purr like twelve cats in a basket, even after he has insulted them egregiously; and a witness, facing cross-examination at his hands, is usually reduced to a state of complete nervous relapse before he even opens his mouth. He has defended and seen acquitted many clients who indubitably were criminals; however, he has never seen them turned loose upon society because of any liking for them but, rather, because he has even less liking for society itself. To him, words from a witness's mouth are always perjury, unless he has put them there himself. In fact, he even expects his friends to double-cross him, and is neither surprised nor hurt when they occasionally do so.

Let us look at him at the end of a case as he sits at a bar nursing his ever-present glass. He sighs and is a most melancholy figure, for he knows what is going to happen. In a moment or two his friends will leave him and he will be alone. Then other people at the bar will join him and drinks will pass freely among them. Next a quartette will form in which he takes part with his silver-plated tenor. In all probability he will feel the urge to recite his favorite *The Elegy for Robert Emmet*, and then, finally, he will find it necessary to borrow twenty bucks from the bartender for taxi fare to his lonely room . . .

Can you *Guess Who?*

SOLUTION

Of course! John Joseph Malone, created by Craig Rice, who also gave us that delightful and wacky couple, Jake and Helene Justus. . . . There will be a brand-new John J. Malone short story in the next issue — *And the Birds Still Sing*. Watch for it — it's a detective dilly!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Barry Perowne's "Knowing What I Know Now" won a Third Prize in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. Since the day the manuscript arrived and throughout the time it took to prepare the story for the press, we have read Mr. Perowne's highly emotional tale at least four times, and on each reading — even after we knew exactly what was coming — our blood ran cold; yes, each time we felt a cauld grue, so that for us at least the story has "something" — we might almost say, there is "something always waiting for us" . . . Every writer has in the back of his head an idea that keeps nagging and gnawing, year after year, at his creative consciousness. For some reason, he can't do anything about it: the idea is there, but perhaps it doesn't quite jell, perhaps he can't figure out how to project it in just the way the idea seems to insist upon. The plot behind "Knowing What I Know Now" was precisely that kind of irritant in Barry Perowne's mind and memory. It nagged at him for more than twenty years. And finally something your Editors wrote in EQMM showed Mr. Perowne the way. Thus, the background-history of this story is almost as fascinating as the story itself — but we'll tell you more about that after you have read one of the most unusual and disturbing tales we have brought to you in a long, long time . . .

KNOWING WHAT I KNOW NOW

by BARRY PEROWNE

A PORTER GAVE ME A HAND TO lift the trunk into the luggage van. It was an ordinary brown trunk, fibre with wooden battens, like a million others. It was heavy.

"Blimey, what you got in here?" said the porter. "A body?"

I managed a laugh of sorts, and I hoped it sounded all right to him. It had a queer ring in my own ears. But he didn't seem to notice anything.

The trunk bore a label with the name *Frank Venhold*, an address, and the direction *Passenger to London*. Name and address were both fake, and *Passenger to Hell* would have been a truer direction. I had no intention of going all the way to London with that trunk. I never wanted to see it again.

I tipped the porter, and — the luggage van being placed about the middle of the train — walked along the platform toward the rear. The doors of the coaches stood open. There were the usual goodbye groups talking at the doors, the usual station smells, the usual hollow, reverberant station noises. All was as usual, yet all seemed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to me subtly different. I felt as though I were walking along the bed of a chasm, with strange echoes beating back at me from soaring rock walls that inclined toward each other. But when, instinctively, I glanced up, there were only spiderwork girders supporting the station roof of dingy glass spattered with rain.

I turned the collar of my trench coat higher, jerked my hatbrim lower over my eyes. I kept a sharp watch on the station entrances. I felt cold to the marrow. My teeth wanted to chatter; my jaws ached from the tension of keeping them clamped. I was poised for a sudden pouring in at any second of burly figures in policeman's blue. I stood outside the door of a coach, my hands clenched hard, deep in my pockets. The station clock looked like a white, enigmatic moon. Its hands seemed painted on it, fixed in an eternal immobility, which it seemed to impose over the whole station. So that, as I looked at the clock face, the people around me, glimpsed out of the corners of my eyes, seemed arrested in mid-stride, held motionless, struck still as headstones. Until the slight, visible jerk of the minute hand broke the spell, loosed the bustle around me, a hiss of released steam, the hollow slam of a door.

Along the platform a guard came walking, whistle between his teeth, holding a green flag furled in one hand, consulting a watch he held in the other. I turned and stepped into the corridor of the train. The compartment before me held three middle-aged women and a small boy with his head in a comic book. I sat down in a corner seat on the corridor side, facing forward, my back to the luggage van with the trunk in it. A jerk and a clanking ran through the train from coach to coach, like a scale played on a cracked xylophone, and the platform sights began to slide away. The dirty glass roof went from overhead, letting in the gray, watery daylight of late afternoon. The train gathered speed and I felt the trunk following me.

I had to force myself to sit there, staring from the window. The gloomy suburbs of the midland town died among green, flat meadows, swollen brown brooks with humped bridges, and lines of leaning willow trees.

We were on our way, the trunk and I. So far, so good. I needed a cigarette badly, but I was afraid to take my hands out of my pockets; I knew they'd shake, and I was afraid the women or the kid would notice.

Then I heard compartment doors being slid open, one after another, all along the coach, and coming closer. It sounded to me as though somebody was being looked for, and I held my breath, strained my ears, trying to hear what was going on above the metallic *tat-tat-tat-too*, *tat-tat-tat-too* of the train. Suddenly a white-jacketed steward appeared in the corridor. He slid back the door of the compartment, put in his head.

"First dinner now being served," he said. "Take your places for dinner, please."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His call went on along the train, and I breathed again. Two of the women got up and left the compartment, turning to the right along the corridor. I had to have that cigarette. The kid was looking at me unwinkingly over the top of his comic. Kids sense things. I got up, stepped into the corridor, slid the door shut, lighted a cigarette. Twilight mist had quenched meadows and willows. The lights had come on. People squeezed past me along the corridor, going to dinner. It occurred to me that they must have to pass through the luggage van to get to the dining-car. If so, I might have a look at the trunk, just make sure it was all right so far. I didn't want anything to happen prematurely.

People had stopped squeezing past me, but I waited till the steward had returned, on his way to the dining-car, then I turned and followed him. Three coaches along, I came to the luggage van. I stopped at the edge of the slightly rocking steel footplate connecting the coaches. I peered into the van, but it was dimly lighted and I couldn't spot the trunk right off. I looked back along the corridor. No one was in sight. I stepped into the luggage van. Nobody here, either — just a smell of kippers from a stack of flat wooden crates, and some bicycles, a folding perambulator, an invalid chair, and four trunks. Two of them were exactly alike, and a moment of panic pumped the blood into my head, because I wasn't sure which was mine.

I had to stoop and glance at the label on the nearer one. The label read *G. N. Trevelyan, Passenger to London,* no address given. My trunk was right alongside. They were identical; they were like thousands and thousands of the same make. A thought came to me.

My plan had been to leave the train at Oxford, the first stop, and let the trunk labeled *Frank Venhold* go on to London, be put in the Unclaimed Luggage Office. Only, something had been nagging at the back of my mind — the thought that the porter who had helped me get the trunk into the van might be a luggage porter who traveled with the train, and he might see me leaving it at Oxford, might chase after me, shouting, "Your trunk, sir!"

Now, as I looked at this trunk labeled *G. N. Trevelyan*, I had a better idea. That label was corrugated; the gum on it must have been dry; it looked as if it might peel off easily. I tried it, and it came right off in my hand. A piston thumped in my chest. I glanced around quickly. On a small counter in a corner of the van were various pink and yellow forms, a hurricane lantern with red glass, a stack of labels, and a gluepot with a filthy brush sticking out of it.

I tell you, the thing was set up for me. *Knowing what I know now, I ask myself by what, by whom? By God? By the Devil? By Fate? By mere Chance? What is the riddle of human life? Why are we here?*

It took me thirty seconds to stick the Trevelyan label over the Venhold

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

label, and to write a new Venhold label and stick it on the Trevelyan trunk. Then I walked back along the corridor. I hadn't really had much hope before. Now, I had hope. I was exultant. I didn't want to go back to the compartment where that wretched kid with the knowing eyes was. I looked into the other compartments I passed, but the nearest I found to an empty was one with just a girl in it. Her eyes were closed. Apparently she was asleep. I slid the door back quietly, sat down in the corner seat farthest from her. I was facing the front of the train. *Tat-tat-tat-too, tat-tat-tat-too.* I could feel the two trunks sliding along behind me through the night. But I felt better, easier. I put my hat on the rack. I undid the belt of my trench coat. I could see faintly in the window the reflection of my face against the mist and dark outside. It was a stranger's face to me — the pale, sharpish face of a man of 35, with black hair brushed back with the sheen of enamel from a high, sloping forehead.

I dropped my cigarette, trod on it, and was taking another from my packet when I felt the girl watching me. I met her eyes. They were gray, but looked dark, the pupils were so large. There was something queer about those eyes, though she was an attractive girl, with amber hair done in this short, modern way with a kind of fringe or bang, or whatever they call it. She looked pale, hunched there in her corner, her hands in the pockets of a loose, light, hip-length jacket with a high collar turned up like a frame for her head. She had neat ankles and low-heeled gray suède walking-shoes, rather pretty.

I offered her a cigarette. She hesitated, her pupils contracting oddly, making her eyes look light and shallow. Then she leaned forward, took a cigarette from the packet I held out, and I noticed her hands, rather square, with long but strong fingers — imaginative hands — the nails only faintly coral-tinted. I held my lighter for her.

"Thanks," she said, and her eyes came close, looking at me, as she leaned forward to dip her cigarette in the flame.

That continual dilating and contracting of the pupils of the eyes — I had read somewhere that it is called the "hippus" and is supposed to be a sign of nervous and emotional instability. As though in confirmation of my thought, I saw her draw her shoulders together in an odd little movement, as though a kind of shudder had gone through her. I didn't like it.

"What's the matter with you?" I said. "Cold?"

"It's all right." She leaned back in her seat. "Just a goose walked over my grave."

I didn't like her saying that, either. I felt those two trunks pouring along like hounds on my heels through the mist and darkness. I didn't answer her. But she went on watching me with those witch's eyes.

"How do *you* account for that goose-over-your-grave feeling?" she said suddenly. "What's *your* theory about it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I've got none," I said. "I'm not a psychiatrist."

"What are you?" she said.

I didn't like her talk. I felt those trunks sliding up closer to my back.

To shut her up — she sounded like one of these intellectual girls to me — I said, "Me? I'm a medievalist."

I couldn't tell whether she believed it, but again I saw that queer contraction and dilation of her pupils.

"Perhaps they knew more than the psychiatrists do," she said, "more of the — the essential truth, the things of — the things of the spirit — the *mysterious* things."

"Are you a student of — the mysterious things?" I said sardonically.

"I'm a student," she said, "an art student. I've just won a scholarship in London. That's where I'm going now."

An art student, I thought. Maybe that accounted both for the good hands and for the emotional instability hinted at by the curious, quite beautiful eyes. She interested me in spite of the trunks that slid along at my back.

She had a slight accent, and I said, "You aren't English, are you?"

"I grew up in Canada," she said, and again I saw that odd tightening of her shoulders, as though to a fleeting chill. "I remember once —"

She stopped. She drew deeply on her cigarette, watching the smoke drift up to the cluster of light bulbs under the bell-glass. On the rack above her head were a small, soft, green hat and a little overnight bag, faintly vibrant to the monotonous *tat-tat-tat-too* rhythm of the wheels.

"I was thinking, as you came in," she said, "of something that happened to me once in Canada. I was thinking of it because it happened so far away — thousands of miles away — and so long ago. I was thinking of it because I have this scholarship, because I'm going to London, because my real life is just beginning — because," she said, with a flash of vehemence, "I can't forget it, and I wish to heaven I could! But it's always there, following me — waiting." She looked at me with those lovely, disquieting eyes. "Have you ever had that feeling?" she said. "Surely, everyone must have had it — in some form. The feeling that something is waiting for you, something — oh, unimaginable, terrible, whether physical or psychical I don't know, but something inevitable, not to be eluded or escaped, just waiting for you, coldly and very patiently — in an appointed place?"

"Certainly, everyone's had the feeling," I said. I could feel my brow coldly damp. "You're talking of Death, a date we all have — only, we don't harp on it."

"My father called it by a different name," she said. "He called it Failure. But that isn't the answer, either. It's —" She frowned for a moment at her cigarette, then looked at me again. "It was in Canada," she said. "My father and I were living in a fair-sized town, in a rather old house, a red-brick Victorian house, on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

outskirts. My father was a widower. He had a poorly paid office job, but he owned the house — on mortgage — and he rented off the upper floors as apartments. We lived below, in a kind of semi-basement. He always referred to it as 'the garden apartment.' Poor darling, I loved him dearly, but I have to admit he was — ineffectual, unlucky — oh, I don't know. Only, I used to wonder, even as a kid, why nothing ever seemed to go right for him — for us. *Little* things! You know? He tried so hard. But if he bought new furniture, for instance, it would seem to get shabby and gloomy quicker than other people's furniture. He would dig and dig in the garden, but where the neighbors' gardens were neat, with lawns and flowers, nothing ever flourished in ours but weeds. Horrible green weeds! Bad luck seemed to follow us. It seemed as though there never could be any escape from it. It was like a quagmire. I used to feel it was something to do with the house, that great, hideous barn of a house. I began to think there never could be any hope for us as long as we stayed there. I *hated* No. 15 George Street."

I wished she would stop. I didn't like this story. The train beat out its monotonous rhythm; the things on the rack vibrated. Our faces were reflected faintly in the windows against the mist and the night. I wished she would stop.

"One rainy afternoon when I was about ten years old," she said, "I walked home from school alone. That afternoon the teacher had been showing us some pictures of desert country, cactus country, dry and wide spaces full of clean, varied colors. Going home, walking home alone with my books, I was wearing rubbers, and a rubber raincoat with a hood. You know how wet rubber feels. Rain, rain, rain! I loathed it. I loathed the puddled lawns, the dripping trees, the dun sky. I loathed all wet, green, slimy things."

She dropped her cigarette, put her neat suède shoe on it. I was trying not to listen. The trunks were following me.

"I always got home before my father," she said. "There was a woman who came in to clean the place for us, leave the kitchen stove burning, everything ready for father and I to cook dinner for ourselves. I had my own key." She was biting her lower lip; her strange, shallow, changing eyes looked through me. "I didn't want to go into the house that afternoon, I hated it so much. I didn't want to set foot in it. I don't know how I made myself walk up the path and unlock that hateful old green-painted front door. It opened into a passage with coats hanging on a row of hooks to the right. On the left was the door of our living-room, beyond that the door of father's bedroom. Farther on, stone steps — four stone steps — led down to a kind of flagstoned lobby, off which, on the right, opened a door to a side street. On the left, the wall of the lobby was glass-paned, like a conservatory, with a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

door opening into the muddy garden. Across the lobby was the kitchen."

Her breathing was quick and shallow; I could scarcely hear her voice.

"I went down the four steps into the lobby," she said, her strange eyes seeing it. "The lobby was full of gray daylight filtering through the filthy panes. I could hear the rain spattering against them. I kicked off my rubbers, as I always did, and hung up my rubber coat on a shelf, meant for flowerpots, which ran the length of the panes. I looked at the water dripping from my coat, making a pool, trickling across the flagstones. I looked out through the panes at tall sunflowers and rank stinging-nettles. The sunflowers were over, their heads hanging heavy and brown and sodden, rocking a little in the rain. The nettles were high and green, like a forest. There never were such nettles anywhere else. Their veined, hairy leaves were pressing up against the glass. They were as tall as I was. I hated to look at them. I turned to go into the kitchen."

She bit at her lips. They were pale pink where her teeth had scraped the lipstick from them. Her pupils were greatly dilated.

"The kitchen door stood open," she said. "It opened inward, to the right. The kitchen was dark except for the red glow of the coal fire through the bars of the old-fashioned stove. There was an old wicker armchair standing obliquely facing the stove, and in the chair — on the worn cushion that always had a wad of old newspapers crammed under it — was our cat. Its forepaws were folded under its chest. I could see the firelight reflected in its eyes. It seemed to be waiting. There was an old alarm clock, with a loud, tinny tick, on the shelf over the stove. I could hear the clock going tick-tick-tick, loudly and questioningly. And I couldn't move. My mouth was dry. I wanted desperately to back away, turn, run. I couldn't move. Only, I felt as though something were drawing me *forward.* But I didn't move at all. I knew that in there, in the shadows behind the open door, there was — something. I don't know. It had no shape. Only, cold came from it. It was waiting. And the clock ticked, the cat watched in the firelight, the rain spattered at the windows, the nettles pressed against the panes, the sunflowers rocked their dead, sodden heads. I don't know — I don't know —"

Suddenly she pressed her hands to her face. She cried as though her heart would break. Never had I seen or imagined such grief. The tragedy of the ages, of the unknown soul of Man and the dim beginnings of life in the swamps of the tree-ferns, was in that brief paroxysm.

"Here," I said roughly, after a minute.

She groped blindly for the handkerchief I held out to her. She wiped her eyes. She blew her nose. I could hear the shudder in her breathing. I looked toward the window, saw the ghost of my own face floating there. I thought of the trunks. I knew, now,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that I shouldn't get away. I knew there was no escape for me. Anywhere. I knew they'd get me. I don't know how I knew, but I knew.

The girl spoke.

"When I came to myself," she said, "I was out in the street, in the rain, running, and had run full tilt into a man. I felt his arms go round me, and heard my father's voice, 'Why, Gina, Gina, what's this? What's the matter?' I couldn't tell him, not then. I could only say that I'd never go back into that house — never."

She was silent for a moment.

"He never made me go back," she said. "We went to a hotel for the night. I tried to tell him what had happened. He sat on the edge of my bed, listening. Did I say he was a small man? A small man, with kind eyes. He looked so tragic, so beaten, as he listened. 'Failure,' I heard him murmur — 'Failure was there.' I've thought about that so much, since. He spoke as though of some projection of himself, of some — some abstraction made carnate, waiting in the house. It was almost as though — as though he spoke of some *hump*, not on his own back, but which he feared he had prepared for mine. For me, whom he loved." She shook her head. "But that isn't the answer. I've thought so much. I've dreamed those dreadful seconds, that eternity, so many times, since — the nettles, the sunflowers, the rain, the pool dark on the flagstones, the open door, the fire red between the bars, the watching cat with the shine in its eyes — all the room, waiting for me, unchanged, and the thing waiting in the room, and the clock ticking loudly. My father died within the year. He had relations in England — in the Midlands here — and they sent for me. And I was glad as the miles became hundreds, the hundreds became thousands, between me and the waiting room. *But I know it's still there.*"

She looked at me as though asking my opinion, my help; but I had nothing to say to her. The train broke its rhythm, began to clatter over switchpoints. She glanced at my handkerchief, balled in her hand. Then she made a movement — somehow ineffectual, as her father's movements might have been, I imagined — as though to reach down her small grip from the rack, probably to take out a clean handkerchief. I rose and lifted the grip down for her.

I tell you, knowing what I know now — yet, what do I know, or any of us? — I tell you, this whole thing was set up for us. By what design of God or the Devil or Destiny or mere Chance had I chosen this girl's compartment?

As I lifted down the grip for her, I saw for the first time the label on it: *G. N. Trevelyan, Passenger to London.*

The train was slowing. Platform lights slid by, flickering, outside the misted windows. An amplified voice was intoning: "Ox*ford* — Ox*ford*. The train now arriving at Platform Four is the train to Paddington."

I muttered, "I'll be back."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But as I stepped out into the corridor, slid shut the door after me, I had no intention of going back. Oxford was where I had planned to leave the train. Yet as it pulled up with a jerk and that cracked xylophone-scale clangor, the girl was in my mind, and the trunks.

It crossed my mind that, though there was not one single Commandment that I had not broken in my futile life, all might yet be forgiven me, at the unknown end of all things, if only I changed those labels back.

I would have done it, too. I would have done it. *But I tell you, this thing was set up.* For when I rubbed the mist from the window, and stooped to peer out, the dimly-lighted platform was swarming with police.

I knew who they were after, and I forgot the girl. I panicked. I hurried along the corridor to the end of the coach, where there was a door on the tracks side. The door was locked. I let down the window. There were only two policemen on the opposite platform. Chancing them, I put one foot through the open window, pulled the other foot after it, leaped from the step to the tracks. Under the loom of the train, I walked briskly toward the front, stepping from tie to tie, hoping that, if seen, I might be taken for the man with the hammer who checks on the wheels and couplings. I reached the locomotive, hissing a white cloud of steam from its belly, and glaring red from its cab, when a shout told me I'd been spotted.

I ran for it. I kept to the tracks, leaping from tie to tie. I came to an iron bridge. I knew it was the bridge over the canal. I knew Oxford; I was educated here; I might have made a different life for myself — if I'd been a different man. I'd had chances. If I'd taken them, I might never have known this hour of flight — this insane moment of clawing like an ape over the iron rim of the bridge, hanging by my hands, feeling new tar sticky under my fingers, smelling its strong, asceptic smell close to my nose. I dropped, landing on all fours on a cindered towpath.

I turned and ran.

I was a good distance away, standing — breathing hard, trying to think — between two gasometers of the Gasworks, in its galvanized iron enclosure, when I heard the train whistling. Through the mist and darkness, I saw the smokestack belching a red, pulsing glare with short, quick respirations. I heard the grind of the wheels. I saw the long line of lighted windows go by.

I knew I ought to have changed back those labels.

I kept thinking about them, about the train, about Gina Trevelyan, about what was in the luggage van. I thought Gina somehow an appealing name. I thought about her strange eyes, her good hands, the look of vulnerability about her. She seemed, alone in that compartment with the wheels going *tat-tat-tat-too*, on and on toward London, terribly solitary and defenseless to me. I thought of her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as a little girl with braids, wearing rubbers, and a rubber raincoat with a hood — all sleek with rain — coming home alone from school to that great, grim, red-brick house thousands of miles away in Canada. I felt terribly sorry for her. I wanted to sit down, here in the dark, and weep for her.

Somehow, the strength had gone out from me. Guilt about those labels — not about anything I'd done before that — robbed me of the will to fight on, to live.

Knowing what I know now, I can be in two places at once. I can be me on the run and I can be Gina in the train. Take me first . . .

I found I had been walking and walking as I thought about her, and I had come to the gray stone hump of Folly Bridge. The bridge lights glimmered down on the river and on the college barges.

I went on up the lighted slope of St. Aldate's. There was nobody about — just here and there an undergraduate riding a bicycle with his gown wound about his neck like a muffler. Coming on up toward Tom Tower and Carfax, I thought of St. Ebbe's. I thought perhaps I might have a chance in that maze of ancient, squalid alleys. I took to the alleys behind Pembroke College. My mind was with Gina in the train. My own plight had become unreal to me. I knew I ought to have changed back those labels. I was afraid. I had never been so afraid. I was a fugitive in dark and misty alleys, and I was afraid of the dark.

Perhaps I wanted to be caught, rather than be alone in the dark. Anyway, I saw lights and figures and heard trumpets. I went with the figures into a plain, varnished hall, glaringly lighted with naked gas-mantels. It was a Salvation Army chapel. I stood at the back of the hall, behind the rows of plain wooden chairs. The people were singing, *Onward, Christian Soldiers*. I wanted to sing with them, but I couldn't. I kept thinking of Gina, and the two trunks, and I was so sorry for her that the tears began to stream down my cheeks.

I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"All right, Caird," a voice said, "better come quietly."

I saw the faces of the congregation turn toward me, in the hard, white glare. I saw the women's faces framed in their bonnets, and the work-worn faces of the men. There was understanding in their eyes, and compassion. They were good, kind people.

I was started on my way to London, handcuffed, under escort, by the next train up. Gina's would not yet have reached Paddington. I realized that these policemen knew nothing about the trunk originally marked *Frank Venhold*, but now marked *G. N. Trevelyan*. I wanted to tell them about the trunk, in case something could be done to warn her. But since they didn't know about the trunk, there might yet be some hope for me, and I couldn't bring myself to speak the words that would hang me.

Instead I asked, "What time is it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They told me. I knew her train must be pulling into Paddington . . .

Knowing what I know now — the questions that I've asked and that have been answered for me — I can be with Gina. I can follow her as if she led me by the hand . . .

As her train drew into the great, dingy, echoing London terminus, Gina drew on her small, soft, green hat. Her little overnight bag lay on the seat beside her. She wondered what had happened to the man in the trench coat, the man who had not returned.

She got hold of a porter at Paddington.

"I've a trunk in the luggage van," she said. "The name's Trevelyan."

"Taking a taxi, miss?" said the porter. "All right, you go and get a place in the taxi line an' I'll bring your trunk."

He brought it, wheeling it on a trolley.

"Strike me, miss," he said, as he uptilted the trunk into the small luggage-compartment beside the taxi driver, "what you got in here? The gold reserve?"

"All my worldly belongings," said Gina. "It's my books that weigh so heavy. I'm sorry about that."

"S'all right," said the porter, strapping the trunk, upended, into place.

"Where to, miss?" said the taxi-driver.

Gina told him to cruise. She wanted to find a moderate-priced hotel. She gazed from the window as the taxi left the station. The night was very misty; every light had its nimbus; muffled forms passed to and fro before the shop windows. The driver, an elbow resting on the trunk beside him, slowed down before hotel after hotel, looking round at her inquiringly.

"No," she said, shaking her head.

Either they looked too dear or too dirty. But as they passed along a narrow, quiet little street — the only shop in it a small teashop with a steamy window dimly shining through the mist — she caught a glimpse of the word *Vacancies* on a sign on some iron railings. She leaned forward quickly to tap on the glass behind the driver's head.

Gina got out, asked the driver to wait. She ran up the steps and rang the bell. After a minute, the door was opened, and an untidy, thin woman stood outlined against the dim light of a passage.

"I'm looking for lodgings," said Gina. "I wonder if you have a bed-sitting-room among your vacancies?"

The woman stood aside. "Come in. You can see what I've got."

She preceded Gina up four narrow flights of worn-carpeted stairs to a room which was an attic but fairly large and tolerably clean.

"It has a skylight," said Gina. "That's rather an advantage, because I paint. What is the rent, please?"

They arranged terms. Gina paid a week in advance, and they went downstairs.

"I've got a trunk in the taxi," said Gina. "It's rather heavy —"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The woman turned and called down some stairs, "Arthur!"

A youngish, but fat and balding man in his braces and slippers came up the stairs, grinning at Gina inanely. He and the taxi-driver lifted the trunk in, dumped it down in the passage. Gina paid the driver and thanked him, and he went away. The landlady shut the front door, turned and looked at the trunk.

"Arthur'll never get that up all them stairs," she said. "You'd better keep it down in our passage and take up what you want bit by bit."

"I'll do that," said Gina.

"My name's Mrs. Coe," said the woman. "Will you be wanting anything further? Me an' Arthur goes across to the local about now."

"There's nothing I need now, thank you," said Gina.

"Then good night to you."

"Good night, Mrs. Coe."

Gina went up to her room, and, soon after, heard the front door slam . . .

Knowing what I know now, I realize that, at about this time, I was stepping into the neat, closed, dark-blue van — the Black Maria — which had been sent to meet the train . . .

The interior of the Black Maria was brightly lighted. The two policemen sat with their arms folded, watching me, but I was unaware of them. I kept thinking of Gina and the trunk, and what might have become of her on her first night alone in the great, grim city of London.

I kept thinking of the story she had told me — of that and of her sudden, hopeless paroxysm of tears. I kept thinking of my wet handkerchief balled in her hand, and of when she was a little girl with amber braids, walking home alone from school, in rubbers and a rubber raincoat with a hood, carrying her strapped books, on a rainy late afternoon in an unknown town in faraway Canada. And on this ride from Paddington across London I couldn't see from my box of a Black Maria, I understood what had happened to me, and why all the strength seemed sucked out of me into those strange eyes of hers. I knew why I kept thinking, "If only we could have met before . . ."

For the first time in my life, I knew I was in love — and had been in love from the moment I had seen her cry. The realization brought me a new fund of resolve. I knew now what I had to do.

The Black Maria pulled up in New Scotland Yard. I was taken to a room glaring with light high up in that grim, turreted building overlooking the Embankment. There was a lean, tight-lipped, gray-haired man sitting beside the desk.

I stood there, handcuffed to the policeman, before the desk, and said, "I'm going to confess. I'm doing it for the sake of somebody else. Before I begin, put out a call for a taxi-driver — she'd certainly take a taxi — who picked up a girl in a small, green hat and a hip-length checked jacket with a high collar. She got off the earlier train at Paddington."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The man at the desk looked at me steadily. I knew my face was working.

"Any other details, Caird?"

I heard a voice speaking that seemed not to be mine. It sounded like a voice ringing far off in a chasm of green crystal cliffs.

"Yes," said the voice. "Her name's G. N. Trevelyan and she had a large brown trunk in the luggage van."

"There's something in the trunk for her to fear, Caird?" said the man at the desk.

"Yes," I said, "something in the trunk."

I saw the man at the desk reach for the telephone, and I heard a spatter of rain at the window looking out on the Thames.

I tell you, this whole thing was designed. It was prepared for us. Knowing what I know now, I say that every step — Even the rain. Take this rain that came . . .

Gina must have been sitting on the bed in her room. She was sitting on the bed, looking round at her first room in London. An uninspiring room, but she imagined it with her canvases hung on the walls, with a studio easel in it, with shelves put up for all her art books. With its skylight, she could make it look something like a studio.

She realized that she was hungry. She hadn't dined on the train. Halfway up this street, she remembered, she had noticed a teashop. It might still be open. She jumped up. Leaving her hat and grip on the bed, she descended the narrow, dimly-lighted stairs. She didn't touch the banisters; she didn't like old houses, didn't like the feel of them.

The house was dead quiet.

She slammed the door behind her. The mist-touch was laid on her brow and lips and hair. She walked fast.

The teashop, still open, was an arty-crafty little place. She was served coffee and poached eggs by a faded gentlewoman. Gina ate hungrily. She was lighting a cigarette when the gentlewoman apologetically presented the bill.

"We're just closing, madam. I'm sorry."

Gina paid the bill. She opened the door. It had suddenly begun to rain. She hesitated. Her jacket was very light. The teashop was midway up the street; the lodging-house was near the end, the last house but one, on the left. The rain seemed to have settled in. She couldn't stand in this doorway all night. She thrust her hands into the pockets of her jacket, ducked her head, and walked as fast as she could.

The lights were shining much more clearly now . . .

This was when the police call went out for a taxi-driver who had driven from Paddington, to a place unknown, with a girl in a green hat, with a large, brown trunk. In that glaring room in Scotland Yard, I was making a statement, a confession of murder, which was to put the rope round my neck. But as the rain beat across the Thames and ran wet on the window, it was of Gina that I was thinking. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was drenched when she hurried up the steps, put her key in the lock of the door. She went in, closed the door behind her. She pushed a hand up into her wet hair, gave it a little, quick shake. The light in the narrow passage burned dimly. There was a row of hooks on the right wall, with coats hanging on them. She looked down at herself ruefully. She was soaked to the skin. She had no change of clothes in her overnight bag, up in her room.

She glanced round for the trunk, now, but it was gone; Arthur must have shifted it below. She moved to the head of the short flight of stairs leading to the landlady's quarters.

She called, "Mrs. Coe?" — and listened. "Mrs. Coe?" she called again.

All was still in the house. There was only the sound of the rain.

She could see her trunk, down there in the flagstoned passage. The trunk stood half in light, half in shadow — a very ordinary trunk, hundreds of thousands like it. She took from her pocket the two cheap little keys tied together with a bit of string. She started down the stairs.

The stairs were of stone. There were four of them. Four stairs? She hesitated, looking at the trunk, a pace or two from her. Out of the shadows came the ticking of a clock.

I was thinking of a little girl in rubbers and a rubber coat with a hood, coming home from school through the rain to the enigma of a dark house and a waiting room. But that was in Canada, thousands of miles away . . .

Louder and louder ticked the clock from the darkness, and she could hear the rain spattering on glass somewhere to her left. There was creeping over her a feeling she had known before — in a single memory and many dreams. A feeling of something waiting for her. It had no shape. Only cold came from it. She fought against the feeling. She looked down at the trunk. Rain or something had trickled from it to form a small, dark pool, dimly visible on the flagstones.

In sudden haste, she forced herself to stoop, unlock the trunk.

She threw back the lid, and the cold was released. Wave after wave of cold passed over her. She stared down, backing away, a hand at her mouth. She was backing into the darkness. She wheeled round, as though to run — and there before her, through a door standing half-open, she saw the red glow of a fire between the bars of a kitchen stove. She saw an old wicker chair obliquely facing the stove, and in the chair a cat with its forepaws tucked under its chest, the firelight glinting in its intent eyes. The unseen clock was ticking loudly, questioningly. The rain spattered on glass to her left, and she knew that the wet, hairy leaves of stinging-nettles were there, pressed to the glass, and that the huge, dead, sodden heads of tall sunflowers rocked and nodded in the rain.

All was in waiting . . .

When the call came in, I was signing my statement. I sat with the pen in my hand, listening to the gray-haired, grim

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man at the desk speaking into the telephone . . .

He finished giving instructions. He was about to hang up when I stopped him. "Wait!"

He glanced at me.

I asked certain questions. He relayed them into the telephone. He repeated the answers to me. I sat with my head in my hands, thinking of Gina, with her strange eyes. Thinking how different things might have been for us — *But I tell you this whole thing was set up for us . . .*

The man at the desk said, "All right, Caird — now, what was the point of those questions you asked? The kitchen, the fire, the cat, the chair, the clock, the garden, the sunflowers, the nettles — these are common to most neglected houses anywhere in England.

"Not only in England," I thought.

I didn't say it. I looked at the keen, rational man, there at his desk, lighting his pipe. What was the good of talking to him of God or the Devil or Destiny or even mere Chance? He only knew the Law — and facts."

But the address was a fact — the address I had heard him mention on the telephone — that was a fact. What made her go, with that trunk, to that house where she saw the sign saying *Vacancies* in the mist?

"Gina, my poor darling —"

Yet, if I hadn't changed the labels on the trunks —

I don't know. Would it have made any difference? I don't know anything. Did *I* kill her? Or what? She knows, now, the address of the house in the London mist. It was No. 15 George Street.

Yes, the history of the story you have just read is, to say the least, peculiar. Do you think the story could not have happened in real life? That it is too farfetched, too colossal a coincidence? Then listen to the author's account of the story's actual background . . .

Once, when Barry Perowne was a child, he got just such a scare as Gina got in her home in Canada. It happened to Perowne in a house on Walton Street, in Oxford. He absolutely loathed the very thought of that house ever after. Then years later — in November 1945, when he had just been demobilized from the army — Barry Perowne arrived in London on a misty night. He faced the necessity of starting his life all over again, but first he had to find a place to live. He got into a cab, asked the driver to cruise about, and looked for a Vacancy sign. He saw one in a street unknown to him and told the driver to pull up. But none of the available apartments pleased him, so he told the landlady that he would let her know. Because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

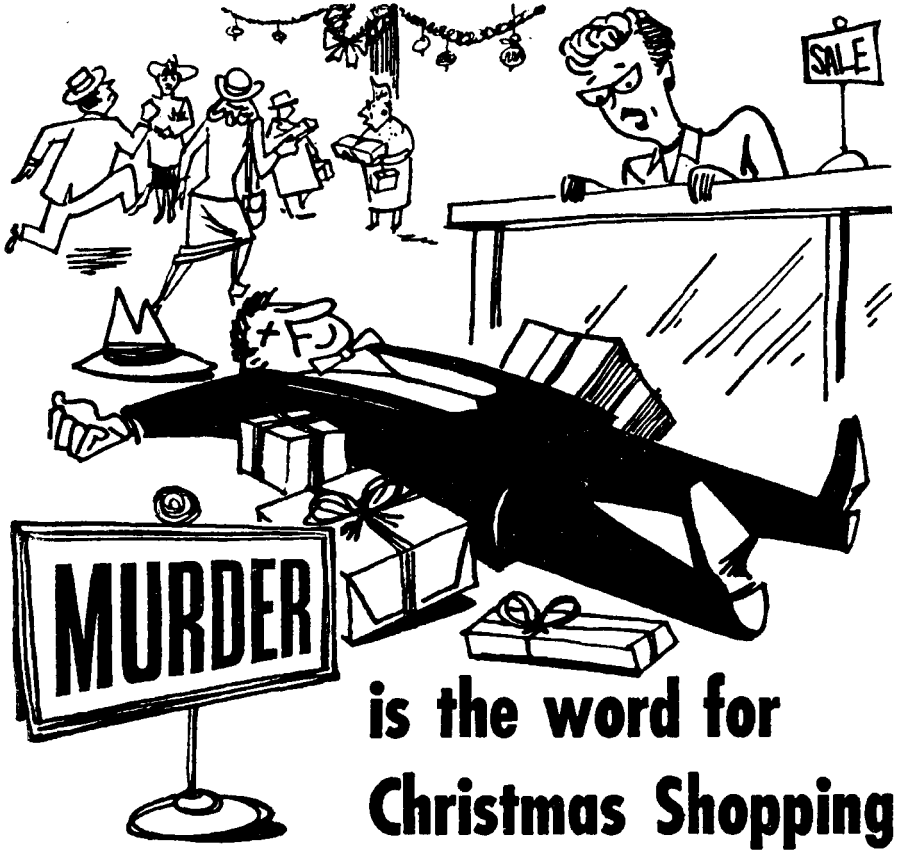
of the mist he had not noticed the name of the street. The house turned out to be in Chelsea, London, S.W.3. The street was Walton Street, and the number of the house was exactly the same as that of the house on Walton Street in Oxford!

As a coincidence, it gave Perowne an extraordinarily macabre feeling. He didn't go there to live — he just couldn't. But the incident kept coming back to his mind, and being a writer, he tried to shift it from the perspective of real life to the perspective of fiction — so as to bridge that terrible gulf between what is *true in life and what can be made to* seem *true in fiction. But the years went by and somehow he couldn't see how to do it. Then Barry Perowne read an EQ editorial comment that spoke of "universal experience," and another (about a Roy Vickers story) of "credible fantasy." It seemed to Perowne that his original childhood scare came under the head of "universal experience" — who hasn't known some such horrid moment? But when we have become grown-ups (so-called), we seem to lose that spiritual awareness which most children have; and when an event occurs which links with an event in our past, we are prone to ascribe it to what we call "coincidence," and don't seem to realize that a kind of chord has chimed, a kind of pattern has been advanced or even completed.*

Barry Perowne thought these strange thoughts, and he remembered two remarks of W. Somerset Maugham's — "I seemed to detect a pattern in my life," and "It is strange how often one sees the same pattern repeated in a family generation after generation." And then Mr. Perowne came across some sentences in a book written by Walter Owen in which he spoke of "Man's diminished contact with the spiritual and mental world. . . . The materialism of the man of our times has extinguished the psychic faculty of a more primitive stage. . . . There is a logical and inevitable chain of causes and effects for every occurrence, once it has occurred. . . . 'As you sow ye shall reap' is not a capricious word-pattern, but the formula of a law inherent in the stuff of the universe, one of the axioms of the geometry of being . . ."

So, for many reasons, some so deep-rooted as to be terrifying, Barry Perowne simply had to write "Knowing What I Know Now." He knew the coincidence to be true, and he had the hope that it was such a whopper of a coincidence that, if it were too big for the reader wholly to accept, it might also be too big for the reader wholly to reject, and thus might leave the reader thinking, "I wonder? I wonder?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



is the word for Christmas Shopping

...but Ellery Queen makes it a pleasure!

Here's a mystery you can solve in just four words: *What Christmas gift lives long, costs little, pleases greatly, and can be bought from the comfort of your easy chair?* Of course you know the answer — a gift subscription to ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE!

When you give EQMM you give the best stories of the world's most famous crime authors — John Dickson Carr, Agatha Christie, Erle Stanley Gardner, Charlotte Armstrong, and many, many others. You give tomorrow's masters, too — the "discoveries" that enable EQMM readers to be the first to enjoy new 'tec talents. And you give the little-known mystery masterpieces of those who have won fame in other writing fields — such authors as 1949 Nobel Prize-winner William Faulkner, W. Somerset Maugham, Sinclair Lewis, James Hilton, and Ernest Hemingway. Yes, you give a great deal — yet pay little — when you give EQMM for Christmas.

TURN PAGE FOR SPECIAL XMAS GIFT RATES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from preceding page)

Here's My Christmas Gift To You . . .

— ELLERY QUEEN

SPECIAL GIFT RATES

At this time of the year only, you may buy ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE at these special Christmas Gift Rates: $4 for the first subscription, and $3 for each additional subscription. You save $1 on each gift after the first! And by entering or renewing your own subscription now, you save $1 on that one, too.

Send EQMM to everyone who enjoys a good mystery story — and don't forget to treat yourself! Mail the Gift Order Form *today*, so that our handsome gift card bearing your name may be sure to reach each recipient before Christmas.

One Subscription — $4.00 Two Subscriptions — $7.00 Each Additional Subscription — $3.00

CHRISTMAS GIFT ORDER FORM

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Please send a year's subscription as my gift to each of the following:

Name..... Name.....

Address..... Address.....

City, Zone, State..... City, Zone, State.....

Gift Card: From..... Gift Card: From.....

Name..... Name.....

Address..... Address.....

City, Zone, State..... City, Zone, State.....

Gift Card: From..... Gift Card: From.....

Your own subscription may be included at the special gift rates. Please check below.

ALSO ENTER MY OWN SUBSCRIPTION— ☐ New ☐ Renewal ☐ Do Not

Donor's Name.....

Address.....

City..... Zone..... State.....

☐ I Enclose $..... ☐ Bill me. Q-N-2

Special Gift Rates **One Subscription—$4.00 Two Subscriptions—$7.00 Each Additional Subscription—$3.00**

No additional postage for U. S. possessions, or countries in the Pan American Union; other foreign subscriptions $1.00 additional per year. No charge for mailing to service men overseas.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Continued from Back Cover

Yes! ALL SIX OF THESE GARDNER MYSTERIES ARE YOURS FREE

YES, it's true! ALL SIX of these thrill-packed Erle Stanley Gardner mystery books are yours FREE on this amazing offer. Just ONE Gardner book is jammed with suspense, mystery, and lightning-fast action—so imagine the "kick" you will get out of SIX books by the world's biggest selling mystery writer! Each is a *full size, full length* book, absolutely complete. A $15.00 value—but yours FREE on this sensational offer.

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club—the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one-third the usual cost!*

The Cream of the Best NEW Mysteries

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop"—by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, John Dickson Carr, and Leslie Ford. All THESE, and many *other* famous writers have had their books selected by the Club. Many of them are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (a $6.00 to $7.50 value) for only $1.89. So you actually get THREE new mysteries FOR LESS THAN THE PRICE YOU WOULD USUALLY PAY FOR ONE!

You Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview," which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books—only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save TWO-THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean—delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Card for 6 FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once—FREE—the six complete new Gardner mystery thrillers described above, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books. But this exceptional offer may never be repeated. Mail postcard at one to:

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
One Park Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

MAIL THIS POSTCARD AT ONCE

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE } **SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD** 35

Walter J. Black, President **UC**
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length Gardner mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume of the month, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

City..... Zone No. (if any) State.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Free 6 Smash-Hit Mysteries

To New Members

all by the one and only

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

All Full Size, Full Length Books • Retail Value $15.00

"Undisputed King of Mystery Writers"

HERE'S an amazing "get-acquainted" offer to new members of the Detective Book Club! SIX top-notch detective thrillers by the famous ERLE STANLEY GARDNER — yours FREE! FULL-SIZE, FULL-LENGTH books, worth $15.00 at retail—yours FREE—*at once*—as a membership gift!

1 THE CLUE OF THE RUNAWAY BLONDE

A CORPSE is found in a field — a knife wound gaping from the back. But there are no footprints!

The D.A. is "gunning for" sheriff Bill Eldon. But the wily sheriff floors him—*and the killer!*

2 TOP OF THE HEAP

Donald Lam, private eye, gets tangled up with a gambler, a burlesque queen, two lively girls—*and a DEAD one.* It baffles police—especially when a *second* corpse turns up! (Written under pen name of A. A. Fair.)

3 THE CASE OF THE ONE-EYED WITNESS

When Mason picked up the phone a mysterious voice said: "See Medford Carlin tonight. Tell him to get another partner. *Matter of life and death!*" But Carlin had never HAD a partner! Yet Carlin is MURDERED!

4 THE CASE OF THE ANGRY MOURNER

A witness *swears* he saw Belle (Mason's client) at the scene of the murder. Exhibit "A" is Belle's compact —with the mirror fragments found near the corpse. And the *murder* weapon is Belle's *gun!*

5 THE CASE OF THE FIERY FINGERS

Perry's client is on trial for murder. The D.A. flings a package in front of the accused woman. She screams and collapses. The jury is ready to send her to the chair—but Perry comes up with a surprise package of his own!

6 THE CASE OF THE NEGLIGENT NYMPH

Mason sees a girl swimming near Alder's estate. He hauls her into his boat. She hands him a letter. "Alder will do *anything* to get this back!" she says. "You *must* stop him!" *Then someone kills Alder!*

—Continued on inside cover

FIRST CLASS PERMIT No. 7
(Sec. 34.9, P. L. & R.)
New York, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD
No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
ONE PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED